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THE WEB DESIGNER'S BIBLE

FOUR BRANDING EXPERTS DISSECT A NEW BRAND

HOW TO FIND OUT WHAT A BRAND MEANS

DESIGNERS GIVE THEIR TAKE ON FLASH 5

BIG BROTHER'S WEBSIDE STORY

HOW AKQA DRIVES BMW'S Z8 SITE

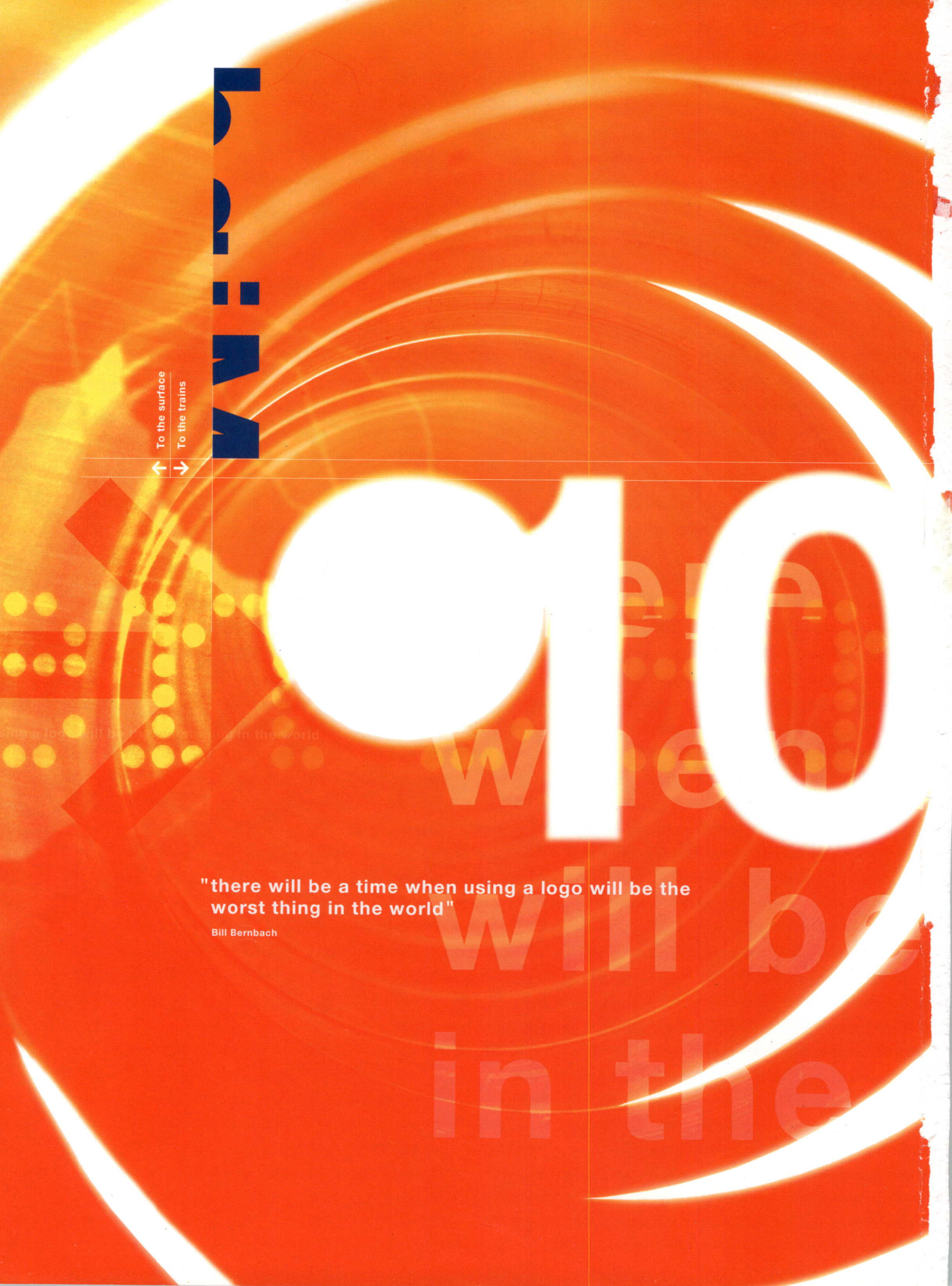
BETA-TESTERS TALK PHOTOSHOP

WHAT 3G WILL MEAN TO DESIGNERS

9 771470 806003 10

SLAVE TO THE BRAND

CREATE KILLER ONLINE BRANDS:
THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE, BREATHE
AND DREAM THEM REVEAL HOW


To the surface
To the trains
"there will be a time when using a logo will be the worst thing in the world"
Bill Bernbach

60 Mind

the gap between your identity and your customer

Way Out

ISSUE 004_**THE BRANDING ISSUE**

HOW TO GET AHEAD IN BRANDING

Fig. 0.1 Iceberg
1/5th
4/5th's
Surface exposure
Identity™
signals the
Brand Actions: Product communications, PR etc
Brand Identity: Perceptions, imagery–difficult to articulate or see but we know they exist.
The brand iceberg
Tangible
Intangible
02
below the surface
03
above the surface
Terms and conditions of use

"In branding, design is the absolute tip of the iceberg – the tangible bit that you can see. What's far more important are the bits below the water"
Antony Wolfson, Traffic Interactive

"Brand creators need to think of brands in the various contexts of a customer's life, 365 days of the year"
Ian Worley, Viant

"It doesn't matter whether you're an offline brand or an online one,it's about the transposition of your brand values, what they actually are and whether they're echoed in the services you offer"
Jenny Taylor, Go

"Often, when clients come in to explain their brand, the missing link is interactivity"
Darryl Feldman, Organic

"If you want to build a brand for the long term, you have to build something that is flexible enough to develop and change"
Steven Blackburn, Gameplay

"An online presence can extend the brand but it must also create something that reflects your original values"
Marc Ames, Natwest

"All experiences that happen online tend to be more active experiences of the brand – unless they're brochureware. They're interactive"
Harvey Flinder, pres.co

SUPPORT YOUR IDENTITY WITH YOUR DESIRED BRAND IMAGE/COMMUNICATION HERE

"I have been impressed by the almost instinctive understanding of brand personality by today's young designers"
Su Sareen, Lateral

"Online, a brand can have worldwide exposure in a fraction of the time it takes across other mediums"
Ken Frakes, Zinc

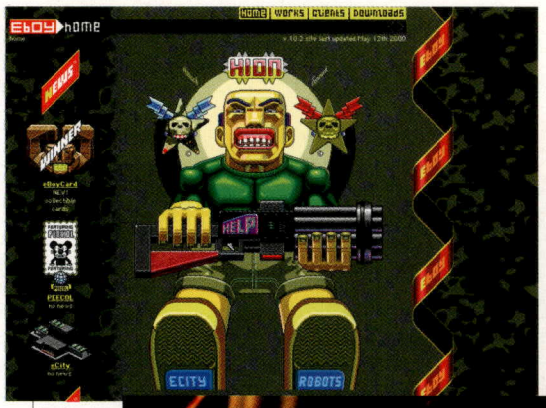
"Simplicity and clarity are also vital when branding on the web. Often, the simplest design is best and ultimately timeless"
Steven Forster, design.net

Fig. 0.2 (Ref.) Brand

ILLUSTRATIONS **AKQA**

Anatomy of a brand purchase cycle (See Fig.0.2 (Ref.) Brand)
A brand's identity is able to deliver what is usually the first 20% of this user experience, the 'awareness' stage. The supporting brand communication and experience is delivered through 'interest', 'trial', 'purchase' and 'loyalty' (the remaining 4/5ths). These elements are not immediately apparent or applicable until the awareness stage has played a successful role.

Anatomy of an iceberg (See Fig.0.1 Iceberg)
Usually 1/5th of an iceberg is above the waterline. That part consists of snow, which is not very compact. The ice in the cold core is very compact (and thus relatively heavy) and keeps 4/5th of the iceberg under water. The temperature in the core is constant: between -15 and -20 degr. Centigrade. An iceberg that has tumbled over several times, has lost is light snow layers and so the iceberg gets relatively heavier then before (with the snow) and because of the greater compactness, only 1/10th rises above the surface.



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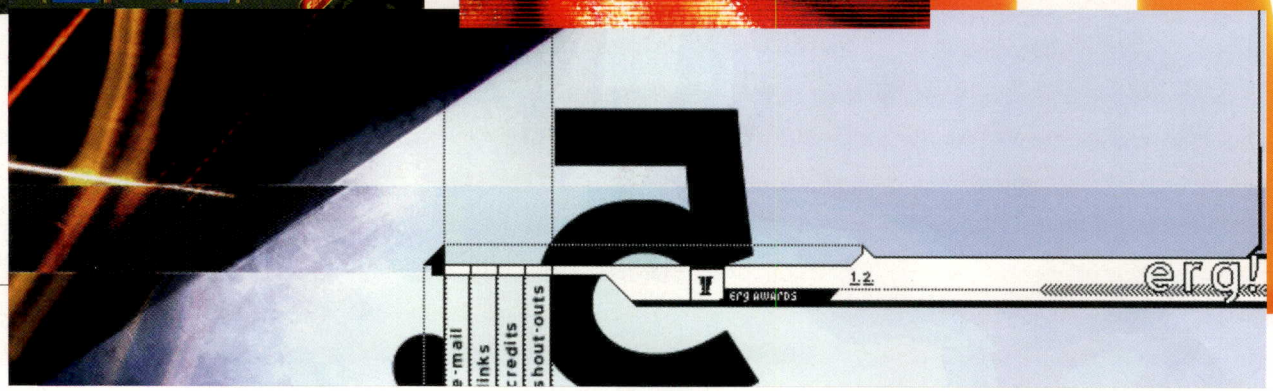

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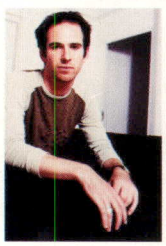
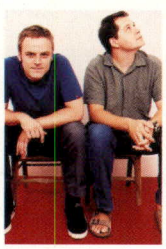
Four experts reveal how they uncover the meaning of a brand





Talented quartet: Magnus Lif talks us through the PlayStation site (p40); Orlando Mathius takes technology to the streets (p44); and duo Friendchip reveal their passion for design clarity (p46).

people

HEAR THE EXPERTS BEHIND THE BEST SITES

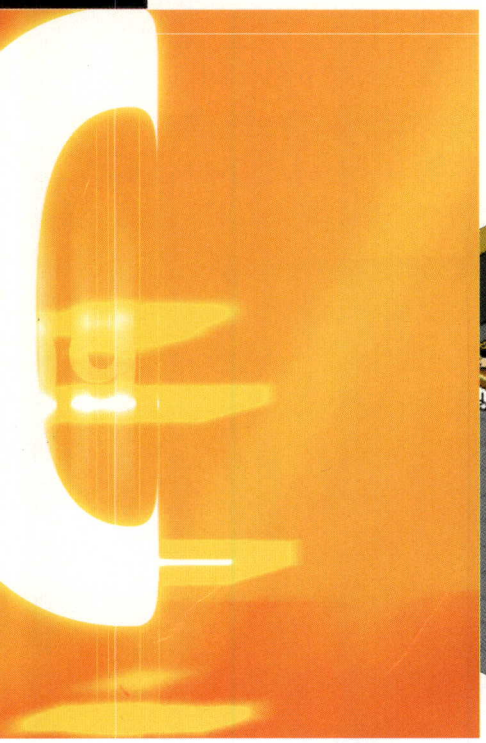
80 **ON THE STREETS**
We pluck people from obscurity to hear which online brands they remember best

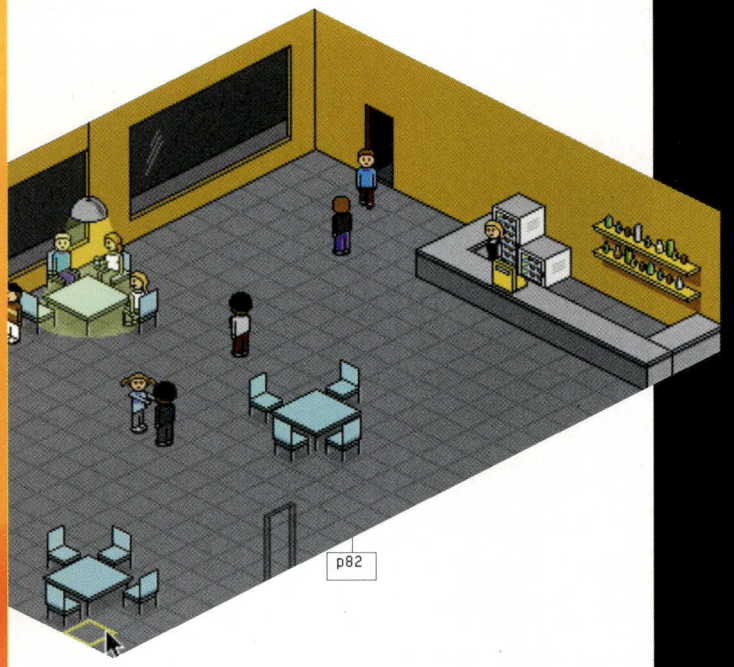
82 **SITE REVIEWS**
Discover the Websites most loved by four of today's top designers: sharing their loves this month are Kleber's Chris McGrail, AMX Studio's Kate Sclater, Kerb's Jim McGoven and the leaders of the Mathmos Graphic Utility Squadron, Rob Lowe and Dave Towers

90 **WHAT THIS SITE NEEDS IS...**
Discover how Freeserve could be revamped. Our panel of experts are given a moment to dream and tell us what they would do given the chance

94 **HIT, MISS OR MAYBE**
See what our three panellists think of extreme sporting on the Net as they discuss www.choosesport.com

RT HERE





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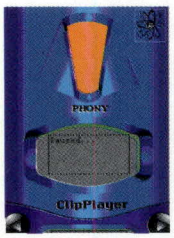
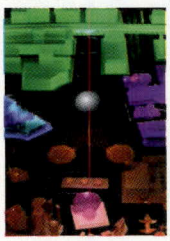
See how Gameplay masterminded its online branding (p68).



Is *Flash 5* all that you wanted and more? Find out with our definitive review and designers' verdict starting on p96.



Screensavers from *Flash* – will *FlashMaster* change your world? See p102 to find out.

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96 **FLASH 5**
We get four professional designers to see how the *Flash 5* beta shapes up in the world of Web design

101 **REVIEWS**
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How to get that first job

108 **WHAT IS A MANAGING DIRECTOR?**
See what the career ladder has in store for you

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ON THE CD

NESTLING BETWEEN PAGES 34 & 35 IS THIS ISSUE'S CD, PACKED WITH DEMOS, UTILITIES & TUTORIAL FILES

FLASHMASTER SE (DEMO)
Convert your *Flash* movies into screensavers

SIGNPOSTER 3 (DEMO)
Make sure Web traffic is heading your way

TURBOBROWSER 2000 (DEMO)
Browse, manage, process and view multiple file types

PHOTOSHOP 5.5 (DEMO)
Try the industry-standard image-manipulation tool

LIVEMOTION 1.0 (DEMO)
Vector animations with a twist for your site

DREAMWEAVER 3 (DEMO)
The professionals' site authoring tool – if you haven't tried it yet, do it now

PLUS

FIREWORKS 3 (DEMO)
The complete Web graphics solution goes bang

DIRECTOR 8 (DEMO)
Test out Macromedia's superb multimedia creation tool

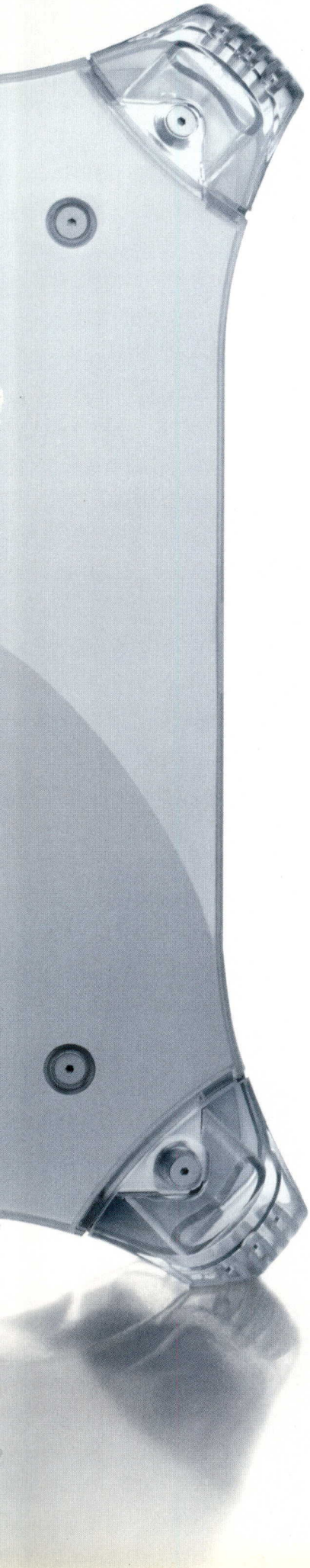
FREEHAND 9 (DEMO)
Giant vector graphics package for you to try out

ACROBAT READER 4.05
Industry-standard PDF viewer

SHOCKWAVE AND FLASH PLAYER
View magnetic site content with these two essentials

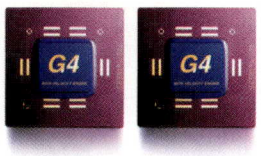
QUICKTIME 3
Essential for streaming video

INTERACTIVE SHOWCASE
Minimal design and cool retro visual effects from Friendchip



Two brains are better than one.

Announcing the new dual-processor Power Mac G4. With its built-in Velocity Engine, a single G4 processor can reach supercomputer speeds of over three billion calculations per second (three gigaflops) – outperforming even the



fastest Pentium III.* Now, with a pair of G4 processors combining their power to attain speeds of over seven gigaflops, the new Power Mac G4 can cut through a common suite of Photoshop tests twice as fast as a 1GHz Pentium III-based PC. A level of performance that will definitely double your pleasure and double your fun. To find out how the dual-processor Power Mac G4 can accelerate the work you do every day, visit us at www.apple.com/uk or call 0800-783-4846.

Think different.

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Future Publishing Ltd, FREEPOST, BS4900, Somerton, Somerset, TA11 7B
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Printed at Cradley Print, UK
Covers printed at Midway Clark Printing, UK
Colour origination Rival Colour
Fifth colour: Pantone 877CV
Fonts: 21st Century, Albertina, Foundry Journal, Lesmore, Officina

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HOW TO GET AHEAD IN BRANDING

Back in 1886 in Atlanta, Georgia, a chap called John Pemberton came up with a brain tonic. Pemberton was enamoured with advertising, and a mere three weeks after inventing the drink, he ran his first ad. During its first year on sale, an average of six drinks were sold each day, generating an income of $50. Unfortunately, Pemberton had spent over $73 on advertising his product. Before Pemberton died in 1888, he sold the rights to his drink to Asa Chandler, another advertising enthusiast who made the bold decision to give away free drink coupons, among other things. Today, 900-million cans of that drink are sold every single day and it's the best-known brand in the world. Coca-Cola has certainly come a long way in its 115-year history.

Coca-Cola might be the biggest brand in the world, but it didn't come from nowhere. It's taken time, money and tons of effort to build the brand to the status it now enjoys. But online brands can't afford to wait 115 years to reach global domination, which is why they keep knocking on the doors of the City to raise more marketing money. With their eyes firmly focused on the future, everyone is scrabbling around to build the online equivalent of Coca-Cola almost overnight. The fatter the budget, the bigger the ads, the quicker everyone knows who you are. Or so some people think. In researching the branding features for this month's issue, it's clear that there's much more to branding than that – especially online.

Contrary to popular belief, big successful brands are not about logos, colours and fonts. The Coca-Cola logo might be a swirl of red-and-white, but it's what the logo evokes which matters most, as Daniel Bonner enthuses on page 54. Coca-Cola has spent years associating the drink with positive messages: even Coca-Cola's very first ad used the words 'Delicious! Refreshing! Exhilarating! Invigorating!' It's what the brand means to consumers that matters most.

When we bring a brand to the Net, the brand values become even more critical. Online branding is not the same as offline. You can't just slap a logo on a site and expect users to remember and love your brand. You have to provide an interactive experience that your consumers love. You have to offer value. If you create a site that people can't use, they simply won't come back again – even if your name is Coca-Cola.

The future will bring huge changes. As personalisation becomes key and we start addressing issues such as the mood of the user and the type of experience they're after, the fonts, logos and colours will become increasingly less important. End-users will be able to design their own logo, or the logo could be changed to stay in keeping with their mood. The logo itself will become irrelevant and the brand values will be what it's all about.

The interactive environment of the Net is carving out a new future for brands, and a new way of looking at how to represent a brand. It's the companies who realise that logos are incidental and user-experience is everything who will go on to build the Coca-Colas of the future.

Mark Higham, Editor-in-Chief
mark.higham@futurenet.co.uk

• Next issue of *Cre@teOnline* is on sale from Friday 6 October

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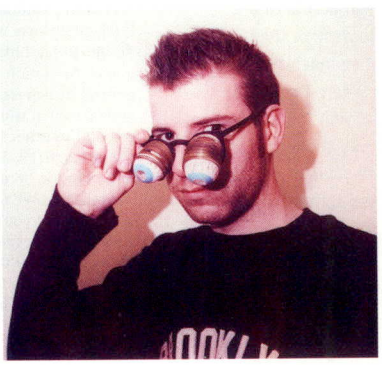
Every issue, we employ the best photographers and illustrators in the business...

AKQA

Stating its core values as innovation, service, quality and thought, AKQA has brought its vision for a new media world to a client list that includes Nike, Microsoft, Nestlé, BMW, Orange and Sainsbury's. AKQA was founded to help companies develop innovative, world-class strategies and solutions using emerging technologies such as the Internet, digital TV and mobile devices. AKQA has built a global reputation for its innovation and creativity.

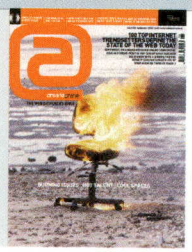


NICK WILSON

This issue's guest snapper has worked on *Dazed & Confused* (assisting the infamous Mr Rankin), *The Face*, *Time Out*, *Jockey Slut* and *Edge* magazines, as well as working for Sony, Parlophone and Grand Central records. He was named Student Photographer of the Year in 1997, and, at 25, has ambitions to become "bigger and highly prolific."

mailbox

"We can't keep up, either with the constant flood of new software and upgrades, nor the skills each one requires" – Jonathan Baldwin, Reading College



YOUR OUTPOURINGS ABOUT THE STATE OF EDUCATION, JAKOB NIELSEN AND MORE. WRITE TO THE EDITOR AT: mark.higham@futurenet.co.uk

www.createonline.co.uk
Let us know your thoughts about the trials and tribulations of online branding. Head along to our site and join in The Big Issue debate forum. The best comments will appear back here next month, on sale Friday 6 October.

RE: US AND THEM

From: Ashley Pomeroy

With regards to Rob Jenkins' letter (*Cre@teOnline*, Issue #2), I feel that making a distinction between 'programmers' and 'creatives' is wrong. Programming is a creative act, and to suggest programmers have to think of themselves as facilitators suggests that programming is a purely mechanistic process, akin to copy-typing. Anybody can draw an isometric, white-on-grey block, but it takes a creative mind to cram an ecommerce system into 24K.

RE: JOB HELL

From: David Wolf

Following on from the comments that Vicky Ritchard made in August's mailbox, I fully agree with her. I am a mature student studying at Cardiff University and am looking to go into the Web design area. It's hard enough coping with the normal subjects, but having to learn the Macromedia products on top of the rest, with no real assistance, it's proving to be hard going. Also, now that it is the summer holidays, I have no real access to the packages at home because of their cost. But my main gripe is not so much the learning of the packages but when it comes to looking for a job next year (I start my final year in September) – all the job adverts are asking for up to three-years experience! How the hell am I supposed to get a job when all the jobs on offer require experience on commercial sites!

***Cre@teOnline* writes:** Take heart from last month's special student Talent feature. Everyone we spoke to is now in full employment – and they don't have years of experience in a working environment.

RE: THE ROLE OF DESIGN COLLEGES

From: Jonathan Baldwin, Prog. Leader, BA and HND Graphic Design, Berkshire School of Art and Design, Reading College

Vicky Ritchard makes a well worn point when she says colleges should train people on software they will use at work. However, the issue is rather complex. Firstly, funding for art and design is woefully inadequate, and the understanding of the particular requirements of this discipline is badly out of sync with reality. Secondly, the pace of technological change as software companies produce more frequent upgrades makes it impossible for education to keep up. This means that in the past, the college I work at has spent a great deal of money on software that has been upgraded by the manufacturers before the clingfilm was even torn off the boxes. Even with educational discounts, it is extremely expensive to upgrade software as quickly as companies release new versions. The only answer is for software companies to provide their products free of charge to educational establishments. It's either that or we start charging students extra fees to cover the cost of staying up to date – not a popular move, I suspect.

Thirdly, and most importantly, I assume Vicky went to college to learn how to be a designer, not a Mac operator. The design curriculum is ever expanding, with traditional skills still being the same as ever (layout, colour theory, typography, critical analysis etc.) and new ones constantly being added – DTP in the 80s, multimedia in the 90s, heaven knows what next. There is more to cram in, yet the amount of time available to us is being eroded constantly.

The fact is we can't keep up, either with the constant flood of new software and upgrades, nor the skills each one requires.

What I think has to happen is that art and design colleges need to concentrate on theory and concepts, leaving employers to fine tune the designers they receive into the systems they have chosen to adopt. This is only right. If we concentrate too much on teaching computer skills, every project we give to students will be done in *PhotoShop*, without even a whiff of pencil lead or marker spirit. The ability to plan a site on paper, to research the users' needs, to test the proposed design on the target market, to come up with a winning layout – these are much more important than being able to master the rollover function in *Fireworks*.

We have a stark choice in education. We can produce excellent all-round designers with the skills to adapt to different technology, or we can produce mediocre designers with a smattering of experience in lots of packages. Employers who complain that graduates don't have the software skills they demand need to bear in mind that the job of colleges is to produce designers with vision, not teach every keyboard shortcut there is in *Flash*.

Colleges don't exist to train people in the software they will use at work, but to educate them in the design skills they will use in their whole career and the critical, artistic and social skills they will practise throughout their life.

FROM THE WEBSITE

CHATTERINGS ABOUT iDTV, TAKEN FROM OUR FORUM AT www.createonline.co.uk

FROM: ED WALKER
I'd really like to start playing around with the pros and cons of putting Web content on a TV but apart from 'You need bigger text and clearer, more defined buttons' there is not a lot of information.

FROM: EDNUS
One major question I have is the resolution. Do we have a fixed pixel width and height or not... and what kinds of specs do browser(s) use, and what are the browsers?

FROM: BEN
1) PAL has different pixel dimensions to NTSC.
2) The standard PAL resolution is 768 x 576, but different tellys can crop this by up to 20 per cent (!)
3) It's a good idea to keep all important info centered on a background as above but within an area of 592 x 480. As for developer resources: Microsoft's Web TV site (http://developer.webtv.net/design/Default.htm) has good information regarding general design issues for TV graphics all of which is relevant to other TV platforms. HTML 3.2 can be reused in the UK on NTL (Power TV), CWC & Telewest (Liberate) but you'll be dealing with bespoke development for Open.... (bastardised Open Author) and HomeChoice née VideoNetworks.

FROM: EDNUS
www.webtv.com is really interesting. They start off with the 640 x 480 then tell you about all the gamma and percentage page loss and eventually get to 544 x 372 pixels... I can't find the page again... doh!

RE: THE NIELSEN PRINCIPLE

From: David Doull

Use of the Web is bigger than just what Nielsen or Kioken see. A site like Nikefootball can be successful because it strongly associated the Nike brand with football, while not having to conform to every useablility principle, such as the 'fast download'. Useability has an important role to play (as do useability experts) and designers have an equally important role – getting the balance right is the hard bit. A site like Amazon.com is all about ease of use, but the Audi site cares more about emotional response. I feel that boo.com failed not because of bad design but because of a bad balance between ease-of-use and design.

From: SKNFLIGHT

Boo failed for a large number of reasons: many of which have been documented in plenty of other areas. They messed up with poor useability, awful download times, stupid over-use of metaphors, ghastly colours, jittery hardware servers, and stuff that people didn't want to buy. ■

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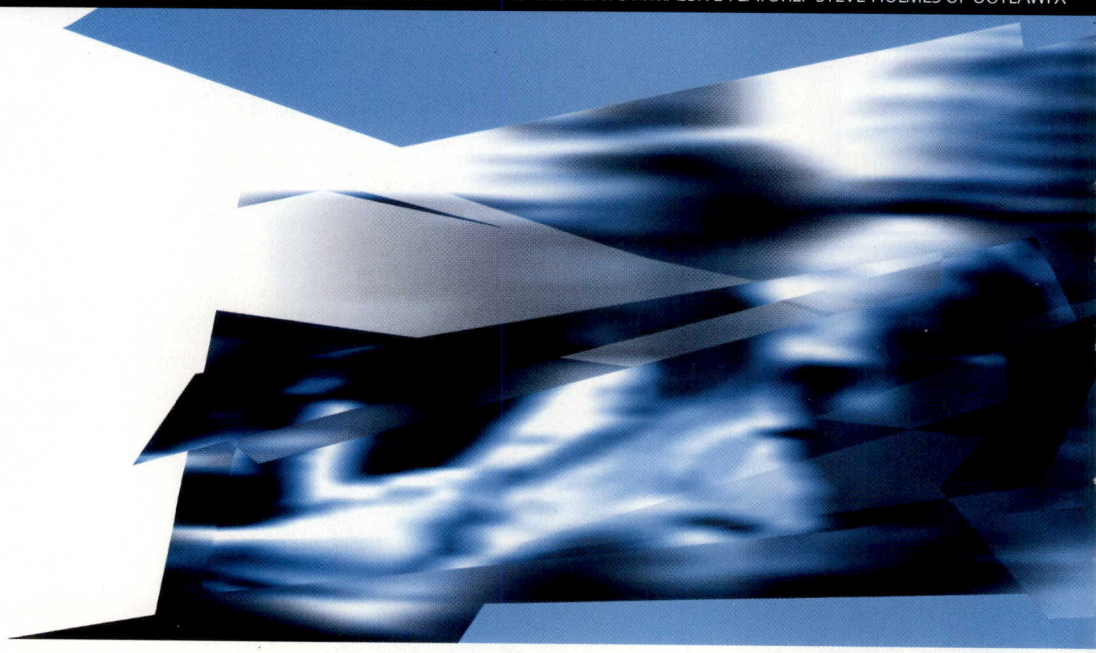
"YOU SAVE A HIGH RESOLUTION IMAGE FILE, AND *PHOTOSHOP* WILL EXPORT THAT AS A NATIVE PSD FILE INTO *GOLIVE*. IT'S A MASSIVE FEATURE." STEVE HOLMES OF OUTLAWFX



LAWSUIT, SUITS YOU

Adobe has issued a lawsuit against Macromedia for allegedly ripping off its tabbed palettes idea. (See news story opposite.) Is Macromedia a scheming software pirate, or is Adobe flexing its marketing muscle? The most likely answer is the latter.

Photoshop and *Illustrator* are still sitting pretty for overall market share for designer types, but once you leave the print metaphor behind, Adobe's fortunes look decidedly mixed. While *Photoshop* remains 'king of the hill' for photo manipulation, *GoLive*, *Illustrator* and *LiveMotion* face serious challenges from Macromedia's *Dreamweaver*, *Freehand* and *Flash* on the Web. While you might use Adobe products to prepare your animations, there's also a perception issue – you're hardly likely to rave about *Illustrator*'s role in your latest *Flash* intro sequence.

Cases like these are notoriously difficult to call unless, of course, Adobe can prove that Macromedia poached Adobe personnel along with a fair bit of Adobe source code. Such allegations mean investigating interface look and feel, as well as the oodles of code which go into user interface creation. And they often drag on and on – remember Apple versus Microsoft? From here it sounds like sabre-rattling as the dominant player realises that it must concede ground to a strong challenger.

For us, that's excellent news. It means we're in for serious innovation, as each player seeks to outdo the other. It means they'll both be working hard to lock you into their workflow models, which in turn means better workflow and timesaving for the professional. Just check out how much of this has been added to *Flash 5* (see review page 96) and newly announced *Photoshop 6*. (See story next door.) While the two combatants tear strips out of each other, you – the design professionals – can feed off the tender morsels of innovation, offers, and feature-set enhancements that are bound to fly off. Happy eating, my fellow scavengers.

TEXT: **GRAEME AYMER, NEWS EDITOR**
e: **graeme.aymer@futurenet.co.uk**

• **Do you agree? Get involved in our forum and let us know what you think.**

PHOTOSHOP GETS SIX APPEAL

ADOBE'S NOT MESSING AROUND WITH ITS LATEST VERSION OF *PHOTOSHOP*. BY ALL ACCOUNTS, DESIGNERS SHOULD PREPARE TO BE WOWED

Adobe has launched *Photoshop 6*, the company's flagship image manipulation software package. The latest version follows on from its previous incarnation, v5.5, in that it contains a number of enhancements specifically for Web designers. Furthermore, there is increased compatibility with Adobe's other Web-focused products, including *GoLive* and *ImageReady*. Version 3 of the latter comes with the new *Photoshop* version, but is not incorporated into the image manipulation product.

Other features include integrated vector drawing support and some automatic generation of HTML and JavaScript. Additionally, you can also generate PDF files direct from *Photoshop*. The application's text handling capability has also been revamped. Adobe has even added context sensitive menu bars.

BRAND NEW FEATURES

Photoshop 6 is packed with a number of handy features that speed up the working process and add increasing functionality to the company's cash-cow.

For instance, the new version now enables you to work on vector images, in the form of shapes and text. You can establish vector masks, which Adobe has dubbed 'clipping paths', and you can edit vector shapes with a number of simple tools. For collaboration or quicker working, any vectors created can be stored in a custom vector library.

The program now has far more text manipulation tools than before. Letters can be warped, and twisted freely as vector images, while remaining editable. And all vector output is resolution independent.

A new feature, called Liquify, is less practical, but will certainly get punters chatting. With Liquify, you'll be able to 'sculpt' areas of digital imagery. It's a bit like heating up a portion of a wax sculpture, resetting a feature, and then leaving it to solidify again.

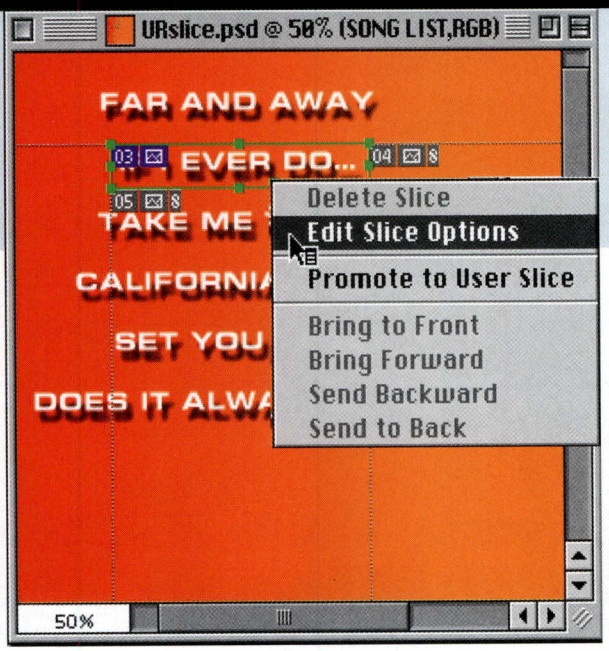
Integration with *ImageReady 3*, the latest version of the Web graphic tool, has been boosted. You don't need to pass images to *ImageReady* for optimisation, as *Photoshop* can handle a number of such functions. But when you do need *ImageReady*, it's a snap to switch from one to the other. Between them, they can generate some HTML and JavaScript code.

Numerous enhancements to the layers function and increased features for easier project collaboration will also prove popular with users.

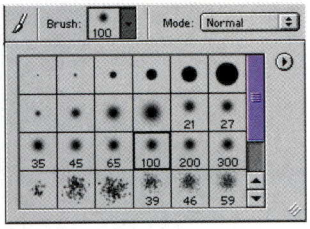
USER IMPRESSIONS

UK beta testers see the upgrade as a positive release. Web designers

"PEOPLE WHO ARE VERY KEEN ON USING *FIREWORKS*, WHO HAVE DISMISSED *IMAGEREADY*, WOULD PROBABLY FIND THE GREATER INTEGRATION SOMETHING THAT'S GOING TO WORK FOR THEM"
– BETA TESTER, MARTIN EVENING



***Photoshop 6* will be a breath of fresh air to you if you've been frustrated by the lack of text effects tools in past versions. Now, warped and stretched text can still be edited.**



will not be disappointed. "There are some designers who would appreciate the tidying up that's gone on in *ImageReady 3*," says alpha and beta tester Martin Evening, a freelance photographer. "People who are very keen on using *Fireworks*, who have dismissed *ImageReady*, would probably find the greater integration something that's going to work for them."

Steve Holmes, another beta tester, and director of Outlawfx, an effects house, is an experienced *Photoshop* user, and sees the new upgrade's integration with *GoLive* in a positive light.

He reports: "With the advent of *GoLive 5*, you save a high resolution image file, and *Photoshop* will export that as a native PSD file into *GoLive*. *GoLive* will then actually create a save for Web feature and save that as a low-res gif [or JPEG] at the size you want. The good thing is that if you decide to scale that object in *GoLive*, instead of just saving one low-res image that you just scale up and lose the quality of, it reloads the information from the hi-res version and updates your gif [or JPEG]. I think that's just the damned cleverest thing I've ever seen. It's a massive feature."

Razorfish designer, Richard Wallet, is more reserved in his comments but remains positive overall: "The type tool is the most valuable addition to v6 for Web designers. Though to be really useful, it would have to finally render aliased," he says.

"Cataloguing in the layers' palette is especially useful. Also, audio notes help other designers work off the same file."

If the beta testers are to be believed, *Photoshop*'s position in the market will remain unassailable for some time to come.

The final test will come in October when the product is expected to go on sale over here. UK pricing has yet to be announced, but in the US, it is expected to retail at around $609. Then you'll be able to try *Photoshop 6* for yourself. ■

PHOTOSHOP FEATURES

- Enhanced vector image support – edit, mask, and output vector imagery – like never before
- Enhanced layer function – edit effects or save effects as styles for specific layers
- Slice tools – cut shapes accurately for the fastest download times
- *ImageReady* integration – this feature saves loads of time when working on Web graphics
- Liquify command – alter digital pictures subtly and intuitively
- Integrated with *GoLive 5*, making re-scaling easier

- System requirements:
- Macintosh
  PowerPC processor running OS 8.5 or later
  64MB RAM (with virtual memory on), or 128MB to run concurrently with *ImageReady 3*
  125 MB on HD after install
- Windows
  Intel Pentium processor
  Windows 98, 2000. For Windows NT4, service pack 4, 5 or 6a is required
  64MB RAM, or 128MB RAM to run *ImageReady 3* concurrently
  125MB on HD after install

MACROMEDIA FIGHTS ADOBE LAWSUIT

ADOBE RAISES THE STAKES IN THE BATTLE FOR GRAPHICS SUPREMACY. BUT MACROMEDIA REMAINS UNPERTURBED

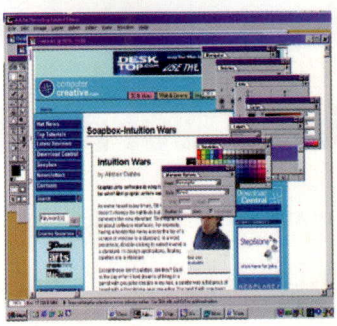
Adobe has filed a lawsuit in the US district court of Delaware against Macromedia for infringement of US Patent No. 5,546,528. The patent covers Adobe's tabbed palette, the company's method of displaying and working with multiple sets of information in the same area of the computer screen.

According to Adobe president, Bruce Chizen: "We are taking this action now after notifying Macromedia on several occasions that its products are infringing our patent. Adobe will not be the R&D department for its competitors."

"Adobe will aggressively enforce its patent portfolio," adds the company's senior vice president and general counsel, Colleen Pouliot. "All we ask is that Macromedia plays by the rules and stop infringing our patent."

Macromedia, which is based in San Francisco and has more than 1200 employees worldwide, remains tight-lipped about the lawsuit. Spokespeople for the company are not, at present, available for comment to *Cre@teOnline*, but the company issued a statement in August of this year that strongly challenged Adobe's claim of infringement:

"Macromedia believes the claims made in the Adobe lawsuit are without merit," it says. "The company believes that US Patent No. 5,546,528 is invalid and unenforceable and that Macromedia does not violate the patent. Macromedia advised Adobe of this belief when first contacted by them in 1996, and readvised them when they last contacted Macromedia in May, 1999." ■



Adobe has filed a lawsuit against Macromedia, finding aspects of its user interfaces unpalettable. (Ahem.)

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"A 3D SPINNING MODEL OF A VCR DOES NOT ADD ANYTHING TO MY SHOPPING EXPERIENCE" CRISTIANO BIANCI, OKUPI

E-WOMEN FIND MONKEY MAGIC

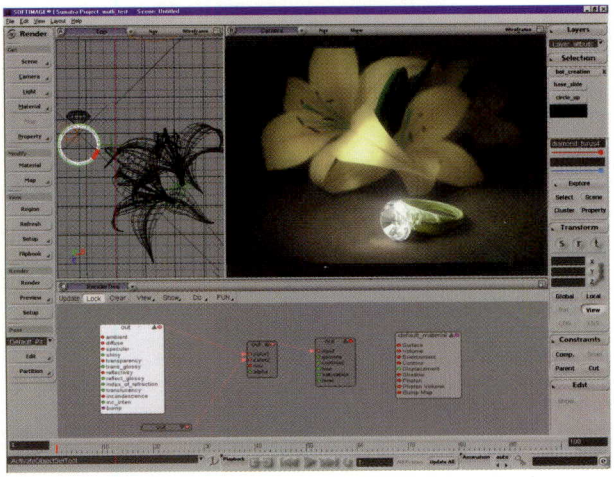
One Bad Monkey Limited, a new media agency in London, has won the contract to redesign the e-women website. e-women is a forum for women working in new media.

The site aims to be an educational resource, and One Bad Monkey intends the new design to encourage more women to participate.

One Bad Monkey came to life in August, and is the brainchild of technical director Stuart Wilson, creative director Duncan Wilson, marketing and communications director Saffron Grover, and 'blue sky thinker' Simon Grover.

"We are hell bent on changing the way clients see content in new media strategies," says Saffron Grover. ■

w: www.e-women.org
w: www.onebadmonkey.com



3D for the Web looks great, but must serve a purpose to justify the cost.

SIGGRAPH SEES WEB 3D SPLASHDOWN

MARKET LEADERS FIGHT IT OUT FOR WEB 3D BONANZA

At this year's Siggraph exhibition and conference in New Orleans, Web 3D was the hot topic with dozens of companies announcing new products and technologies.

Several key players announced 3D solutions. This includes Macromedia and Intel, who have allied to develop 3D streaming through a future version of Macromedia's *Shockwave Player*. Alias|Wavefront, Discreet, and Softimage all declared support for the new format.

Metastream, the 3D Web technology developed by MetaCreations, will go head-to-head with this alliance with its format *Metastream 3*. It's aimed directly at ecommerce applications and is already used by companies like Nike and Sony to create interactive 3D models of products at online stores. *Metastream* also boasts some major supporters of its own, including Adobe, Softimage and CuriousLabs, the new publishers of *Poser*.

Despite the hype, adding 3D to Web designs is no simple task.

"To develop good 3D requires lots of skills, ranging from 3D modelling, lighting, understanding of space-design and programming," says Okupi's senior project manager and creative lead, Cristiano Bianci.

"I don't see the point in many of these technologies. To have a 3D spinning model of a VCR does not add anything to my shopping experience." ■

w: www.macromedia.com
w: www.intel.com
w: www.metacreations.com
w: www.okupi.com

ADSL ROLLS OUT TO BUSINESS

Following BT's announcement in April that it would be introducing ADSL nationwide, a number of ISPs have brought out new services. These include players such as Demon, Zen Internet and Nildram. BT has ADSL-enabled about 500 exchanges nationwide, but mostly in large cities like London, Leeds, Cardiff, Belfast and Glasgow. But BT customers face a waiting list of up to two months, and to date there are 130,000 businesses on BT's list.

Smaller, local service providers like Rochdale-based Zen Internet could benefit from BT's problem, despite higher charges. Zen has already gone live with ADSL packages.

"We're taking the lead here in the North," says Zen operations director Ross McWilliam. "Most parts of the UK are still waiting for ADSL." ■

www.zenadsl.com
www.getadsl.com
www.demon.net

CLIENTS FROM HELL

CLIENTS ARE GREAT: THEY PAY YOUR BILLS AND TELL YOU THAT YOU'VE DONE A GOOD JOB. BUT SOMETIMES...

When it comes to designing for the Web, who's in charge? Is it the client or the Web designer? According to one source, the line is often blurred:

"There was one client who would change his mind at every different meeting: 'I want you to use these sorts of colours and give it this sort of feel.' So I'd go away, make the changes, and come back and he'd say 'Oh no!' and completely change his mind. By the end of it, he was getting people his end to do the design and sending it through to us and saying 'I want it to look like this', rather than trusting us as designers. This went on for six weeks but I'm not on the job anymore, luckily. I went on holiday, came back and someone else had taken over. I was rescued." ■

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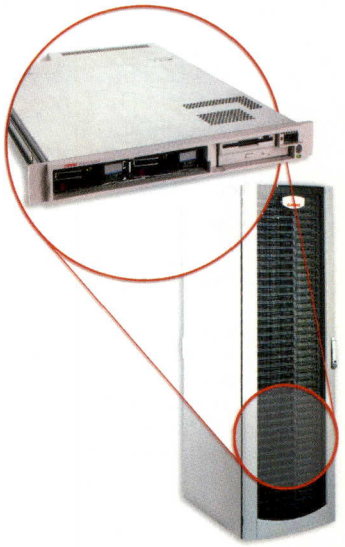

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"ANY SITE THAT YOU HAVE DEVELOPED AND THAT USED META TAGS NOW POTENTIALLY INFRINGES THE RIGHTS OF A NAMED COMPETITOR" ROBERT WEGENEK, LAWYER

META TAGS ARE MEGATROUBLE

IF YOU USE META TAGS CONTAINING THE NAMES OF YOUR COMPETITORS, YOU'RE COMMITTING A CRIME ACCORDING TO UK LAW. ROBERT WEGENEK INVESTIGATES

Website designers should be aware that the practice of META tagging has been the subject of recent litigation. The resulting judgment means the practice has effectively been outlawed, as far as English law is concerned.

The case involved Roadtech Computer Systems against a competitor, Mandata, and it has helpfully clarified the legal position. Mandata had incorporated a number of Roadtech's trade marks into its own website in order to attract search engines to it. The court took the view that Mandata had been infringing Roadtech's trade marks and also had been guilty of passing off. Happily, this is a practice that we have consistently advised our own clients to avoid.

Quite apart from the intriguing result that even the invisible use of competitors' brands can be prevented, this ruling does burden website designers with a certain amount of responsibility. It is important that you are aware that this practice is not allowed and you should not offer this to your clients as an option. If a client insists on META tagging the names of their competitors, the designer should insist on a full indemnity.

Any site that you have developed and that has used META tags now potentially infringes the rights of a named competitor and it is recommended that this position is corrected sooner rather than later.

Similar practices such as the use of hidden text/word stuffing would be likely to be viewed in the same way by a court. The fact that they are difficult to detect is not really the issue. This type of evidence can be subject to court rulings requiring that it is disclosed in legal proceedings and my recommendation would be to err on the side of caution. ■

Robert Wegenek is a partner in hammond suddards edge's interactive and marketing practice.

e: robert.wegenek@hammond suddardsedge.com

PRES.CO/FORESIGHT GOES FOR LAMBIE-NAIRN

The recently merged company formed by Pres.co and Foresight has chosen Lambie-Nairn to create its new brand.

The choice of the high-profile branding agency signals a scaling up of activity for the soon-to-be-named company within the media industry.

Lambie-Nairn's portfolio includes a number of high-profile broadcast clients such as the BBC, ITN and teletubby tycoon, Ragdoll.

"The investment in a brand... is representative of the direction we will be growing in," says Nicola Atkinson, Pres.co's public relations manager. "We already do interactive television work, and this has been on the increase."

Work will be completed by the end of the year. ■

w: www.pres.co.uk
w: www.foresight.co.uk
w: www.lambie-nairn.co.uk

VI[Z]RT VIRTUALLY SET FOR WEB

The company recently formed by the merger between virtual set manufacturer RT-SET and broadcast company Peak, has taken a new name.

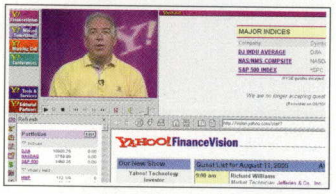
Vi[z]rt, as the company is now called, is headed by RT-SET president and CEO Shlomo Nimrodi. Nimrodi retains his title, while Peak boss Petter Ole Jakobsen takes on the role of executive pixel pusher. Vi[z]rt is confident of its new identity.

"We strongly believe that not only will the new name become synonymous with new visualisation technology the market needs, but it will also carry us forward, into and beyond the next stage in our development," says Nimrodi.

This next stage entails Web broadcasting – you can see its virtual set technology on Yahoo's FinanceVision news station, financevision.yahoo.com.

Les Young, managing director of virtual set design company Virtual Video Studios in London, sees broadband as a deciding factor for the technology to boom online. "I think the Web-broadcast market will take off hugely when the bandwidths get bigger in a year or two," he says. "We would certainly consider branching into this market." ■

w: www.vizrt.com
w: www.financevision.yahoo.com



Yahoo's FinanceVision is set to benefit when broadband takes off.

BROADBAND BLOW OUT

WILL WE BE BIDDING A FOND FAREWELL TO THE LITTLE GUYS ONCE THE PIPES GET FAT?

European broadband Internet access is set to grow from 0.2 per cent to almost 18 per cent by 2005, according to Forrester Research.

The company predicts that this growth will lead to a shake-up of the service provider market because of the need for heavy investment.

"The new economics focused around scale, scope and brand strength will change Europe's Internet access landscape," says Forrester analyst Lars Godell. "Established telcos and their ISP affiliates will crush cable companies like Chello, independent ISPs like Freeserve, and broadband pureplays like B2."

However, Peter Ekelund, head of strategy and co-founder of B2, is confident the smaller fish will survive. "Our next generation technology, along with our success in the Swedish market, gives us a unique first mover advantage when it comes to expanding in Europe," he said.

According to Forrester, the area of highest broadband penetration is likely to be Scandinavia, where 36–40 per cent of households will have access provided, while in France, penetration will only be around 11 per cent. The UK will see about 20 per cent access by 2005.

Around 80 per cent of broadband access is expected to be in the form of cable modem and ADSL connections, with ADSL slightly ahead with an estimated 53 per cent of the market share. ■

w: www.forrester.co.uk

Broadband access in households is set to increase most dramatically in Scandinavia.

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Set Up: From £159 + VAT
Monthly: From £239 + VAT

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- 9 to 72 Gig Hard Drive*
- 50 GB Data Transfer*
- 2+ IP Addresses*
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- Red Hat Operating System
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- 2+ IP addresses*
- Apache Web Server
- Solaris Operating System
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"MULTIPROCESSOR IS A GOOD IDEA, BUT YOU NEED HIGHER CLOCK SPEEDS TOO" ERIN STANILAND, SAS

NOKIA SEEKS MIDAS TOUCH

Midas Internet has been appointed to promote the jobs section of Nokia's UK website. The mobile-phone manufacturer anticipates having up to 60 vacancies per month in Britain, and has decided to give its career-oriented Web pages a boost.

Midas' online marketing role will include banner ads, media planning and buying, as well as optimising for search engines.

Midas' commercial director, Simon Roberts, is pleased: "This is an exciting project for us to be involved with. We will be implementing our unique sets, as well as applying our ROI tracking and profiling technologies to enhance the effectiveness of the campaign." ■

w: www.nokia.co.uk/careers
w: www.midasinternet.com

APPLE AND COBALT IN FACE-OFF?

Cobalt Networks, maker of the Qube, has indicated that it may take action against Apple, maker of the G4 Cube. Apple's eight-inch box and product name bears more than a striking resemblance to Cobalt's seven-inch server, the Qube. And 'Cube' is a registered trademark of Cobalt Networks.

A lawsuit would be ironic, as Apple vigorously litigates against any computer manufacturer it believes to have copied its iMac design in any way.

"Cube, Qube, and Cobalt Qube are registered trademarks of Cobalt Networks," says spokesperson, Christopher Bunn. Cobalt's US president of marketing, Kelly Herrell, says: "Cobalt is concerned about possible trademark infringement. There has not been a lawsuit filed by Cobalt. Cobalt will determine the next steps when appropriate." Apple declined to comment. ■

w: www.apple.com
w: www.cobalt.com

DESIGNERS BITE APPLE

NEW MACS WELL RECEIVED, BUT THE BATTLE FOR HEARTS AND MINDS AIN'T OVER YET

CreateOnline readers have been taking issue with Apple's new range of products announced at the recent Macworld show in New York. The new mouse and keyboard go down well, but there are mixed feelings about the new G4 Cube and multiprocessor systems.

According to Erin Staniland, a multimedia designer at SAS: "Multiprocessor is certainly a good idea, but you need the higher clock speeds as well. You can't just add more chips. I think the slower clock speeds will be an issue."

Digit's Jon Shaw begs to differ: "I'd like one!" he says. As he handles the agency's video output, the extra processor is definitely a positive addition for him. "The main problem I have is render time. A couple of years ago, when you were rendering a big piece for broadcast quality, you might find your idea doesn't work two days later, and then you're back to square one."

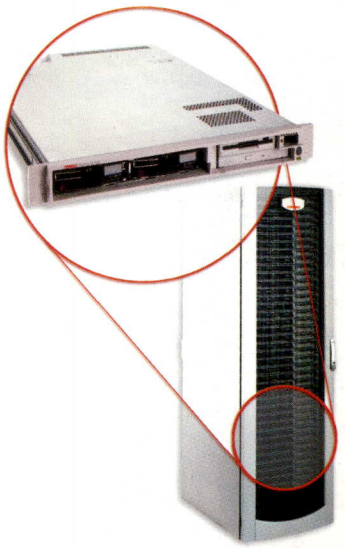
There is confusion about the Cube's target market. One posting on *Cre@teOnline* website's forum sums it up: "It's like one of those prototype cars you see at motor shows – they look great but are totally useless."

For more details, take a look at the new computercreative.com, or go to our website forum. ■

w: www.apple.com
w: www.createonline.co.uk
w: www.computercreative.com

New G4s look good to Web designers, but Apple still has to think about target audiences when launching new products.

we manage, you control.



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Although each dedicated server is fully managed by our experts, you are in total control of your client's hosting. The Compaq ProLiant DL360 server is your resource and is designed to be totally flexible and scalable so that it can cope with your changing needs.

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- Easy to manage web interface with server availability and bandwidth monitoring
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- Optional DNS / Email management, IP addresses, bandwidth and disk space
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"YOU CAN'T TAKE AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE SITE, TRANSLATE IT TO GERMAN AND MAKE IT WORK... YOU THEN MAKE IT USELESS" EOS VENTURES' BOSS DELON DOTSON

DESIGNER DIARY

WHAT'S ON IN THE UK AND EUROPE

12 SEPTEMBER-14 SEPTEMBER
Computer Arts LIVE!
Business Design Centre
Islington
London
www.computerartslive.co.uk
Showcase of the latest design tools and techniques. Plus a Macromedia presentation and The Adobe Web Conference.

26 SEPTEMBER
Offline Branding for Online Business
Millennium Britannia
Grosvenor Square
London
www.haymarketconferences.com
Maximising clients' identity with keynote speeches from brand gurus at Ogilvy, bol.com and First Tuesday among others.

19 SEPTEMBER-20 SEPTEMBER
International Conference on Virtual Communities
Church House Conference Centre
Westminster
London
www.infonortics.com/vc
How we can learn from what is happening at the moment to build successful virtual communities now and in the future.

29 SEPTEMBER-30 SEPTEMBER
The Expo 2000
Business Design Centre
Islington, London
www.theexpo2000.co.uk
Stalls, showcases and product demos at the resurrection of the UK Mac show.

4 OCTOBER-5 OCTOBER
Internet World 2000
RDS, Dublin
www.internetworld.co.uk
Presentations from Microsoft and Intel, strategic sessions on retail and marketing, plus a section on mobile commerce in Wireless Internet World.

WHAT'S ON IN THE US

9 OCTOBER-12 OCTOBER
Apple QuickTime Live!
Beverly Hilton Hotel
Beverly Hills
California
www.apple.com/quicktimelive
A four-day conference featuring technical sessions, workshops and a product showcase. ■

ELANCE SPREADS REACH OF WEB PROFESSIONALS

You can now become an 'e-lancer', with the launch of eLance.com. It is a 'global services marketplace', enabling freelancers and agencies in a number of disciplines, including Web design, to bid for work at competitive prices, regardless of geographical location. It also acts as a broker for those seeking services to find contractors.

"While financial markets are extremely efficient, the services marketplace is extremely inefficient," remarks UK manager James Fulton. eLance.com sets out to correct this balance, and over 150,000 people have so far used the service, and well over £17million-worth of projects have been listed.

Monitoring, feedback and messaging maintains quality. "It is the market regulating itself," claims Fulton. ■

w: **www.elance.com**

Foodoo
Register to win a complete set of personally Signed Cookbooks
about foodoo
register
Full of Beans
Beans are among the oldest foods known to man, dating back at least 4,000 years...
read more
The Food-lover's Edinburgh
Edinburgh-based writer Sue Lawrence gives us her favourite local addresses...
read more
on foodoo
Sophie Grigson
Ken Hom
Gordon Ramsay
Gary Rhodes
John Torode
Antony Worrall Thompson
in foodoo
Foodoo Home
Features
Foodoo Recipes
search foodoo
search glossary
go
NewMediaAge site of the week
Foodoo
what do you want to cook?
recipe search
go
This weekend's menu
Edinburgh International Festival 2000 13 August - 2 September
The Edinburgh Festival was first held in 1947 and has grown into the biggest arts event in the world, featuring opera, music, dance and theatre. For a rather less high-brow approach to entertainment, the Fringe Festival (currently on) offers everything from comedy to mime - so if you're a budding street performer, head North!
Read The Food-lover's Edinburgh to find out how to entertain your taste buds while you're there...

Eos Ventures developed Foodoo.com in-house because of poor work from an agency.

MASTER WEB DESIGNERS

EOS HEAD DELON DOTSON BRIDGES ONLINE CULTURAL DIVIDE

Eos Ventures' boss Delon Dotson has started a worldwide federation of Web designers and developers to help clients put together localised sites.

Dotson contracted an agency to produce Foodoo.com but was so appalled by the agency's apparent apathy that he sought out other designers to construct the site. "I said to the CTO: 'You don't care. If I had a union then I would kick you out'."

Dotson sees this as a Europe-wide phenomenon, and has therefore started what he terms a 'Federation of Web designers', comprising 600 of the top one per cent of Web professionals in 14 countries.

"Think of it as a W3C for Web development," he says. To him, it's all about culture. "You can't take an English language site, translate it to German, and make it work," he says. "I believe you then make it useless. Americans can't use it, and the Germans don't want it at that point."

Members work together to ensure sites are developed with appropriate cultural emphasis. "When you want a Spanish roll out, it's done by people in Spain," Dotson explains. "They know how to make it Spanish."

When work comes in, Dotson contracts out projects to members of the federation who are most qualified to handle the job. Besides Europe, the federation now includes US members, and Asia is next. Dotson keeps names of member companies close to his chest, and is keen to keep control of the federation as tight as possible.

"There's a limit to what we want to be; it's already pretty big," he says. "I don't want to be a gate. If a creative agency comes along with really great skills, of course I'll want to welcome them in. But I'm not trying to open this to an open market.

"It's a new approach and it's something we'd like to foster." ■

w: **www.eosventures.com**
w: **www.foodoo.co.uk**

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE: FRIDAY 6 OCTOBER

COMING NEXT MONTH: SEX

Summer might be but a distant memory, but we're coming over all hot and sweaty in time for next month's issue

Over the years, sex has been renowned for driving technology forward. Even today, sex sites are still some of the most profitable on the Web. In next month's issue of *Cre@teOnline*, we explore why they're so popular and what you can learn from them. We interview some of the leading lights to find out how they have made money at online sex and the advice they have to offer. Then we delve into the imaginative PR and marketing campaigns which have been waged.

PLUS:

- **Pitching for a new account? Next month we follow several new media agencies to find out how they pitch and the complex processes they go through to convince a client to opt for them.**
- **We debate the ultimate pitch document. Five experts come up with the definitive list of what to do if you want to woo over potential clients.**
- ***GoLive 5* is ready for launch at last. We give it to a bunch of designers to see how it stacks up.**
- **What is an information architect? There's a plethora of new job titles emerging. We start a new series looking at what some of those roles involve.** ■
- **All contents correct at time of going to press**

news

"THE MODERN MARKET RESPONDS TO INNOVATION AS WELL AS HERITAGE" PETER INGWERSEN, LEVI'S

HEALTHY DISCOVERY FOR BLUEWAVE

London Web design agency Bluewave has been commissioned to design and build the first 20 pages of the Discovery Networks' Discovery Health online service.

Bluewave began by ensuring that Discovery Health was operating effectively online, and the company's brief now includes the integration of a content management system, to extend the range of dynamic content.

According to Bluewave's sales and marketing manager Alex Barnett: "The audit is revealing many issues that we will be helping to resolve. By going through this short period of sound planning, Discovery's pan-European network is laying sound foundations for future building." ■

w: **www.health.discoveryeurope.com**
w: **www.bluewave.com**

ON OUR WEBSITE

Read the magazine and want to have your say or see more? Then connect to the *Cre@teOnline* website, which is now up and running and packed with content.

You'll find all the latest news, reviews, views and opinions here, together with elements from the magazine (such as 'On the Streets', and 'Site Review') and specially created online features.

This month, you can read the full version of last issue's definitive main feature, *Cre@teOnline*'s top 100 survey on the state of the Net 2000. Read all the responses in full, and then tell us what you think by filling in the survey yourself. We'll add the best responses to the database, so others will be able to view your responses.

If you want to ensure you're ahead of the rest, you can subscribe to our email bulletin which provides you with weekly information about the world of Web design. Plus, you can have your say in one of the many topical discussions in our forum. And if you're looking for a job, check out our recruitment link – for advice and essential situations vacant. ■

w: **www.createonline.co.uk**

STREETWEAR MEETS HARDWARE

PHILIPS AND LEVI'S COLLABORATE ON WIRED CLOTHES

Remember those episodes of *Tomorrow's World* from yesteryear that promised walking, talking clothes? Well, the time is now. Philips and Levi Strauss have come together to create a range of clothing with an integrated network stitched in.

Now, if you own a Philips Xenium 989 mobile phone or a Philips Rush! MP3 player, you can plug the pair into your jacket and play. Everything's operated from a single unified built-in controller, and each garment entails a microphone and earphones, so once you're wearing it, you can be 'always on' – just like a leased line connection.

The clothes – urban jackets for the most part – are all part of Levi's Industrial Clothing Division+ (ICD+) range. The company has recently seen a slump in sales as popularity of its ubiquitous 501 brand has waned over the last few years. It hopes to be seen as a leader in the field as the first company to introduce such a range.

"The modern market responds to innovation and new products as well as heritage and we needed to address these modern market drivers," says Levi's premium brand director Peter Ingwersen. "These developments in wearable electronics have helped workwear re-invent itself." ■

w: **www.levis.com**

NEW FUTURE SITE FOR COMPUTER CREATIVES

How do you link *Cre@teOnline* to the likes of *MacFormat*, *3D World* and *Computer Arts*? The answer lies in the Web, in the form of a new website: computercreative.com

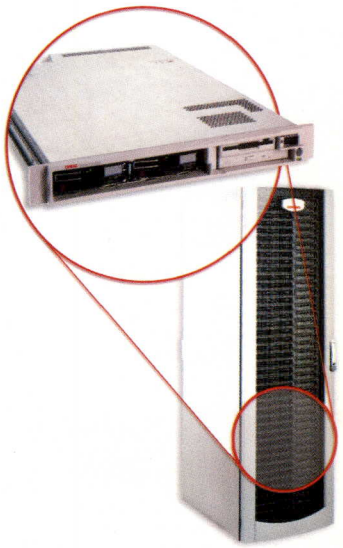
Future publishes a number of essential reads for everyone in new media and computer-based design, so computercreative.com amalgamates all that knowledge in one place.

There's hot news, top tutorials, and the latest reviews from each of the four titles. Plus, if you like a bit of vitriol and venom, there's even a soapbox channel, where industry figures have their say.

If you make a living from computer generated design, whether 3D, the Web, graphic design or video, computercreative is an essential resource. ■

w: **www.computercreative.com**

99.5% availability guaranteed.



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- The high performance Compaq ProLiant DL360 server
- 99.5% availability guaranteed
- RAID enabled hot swappable disks – 'data secure' disk replacement without powering down
- Easy to manage web interface with server availability and bandwidth monitoring
- 40 Gb data transfer/traffic per month
- Optional DNS / Email management, IP addresses, bandwidth and disk space
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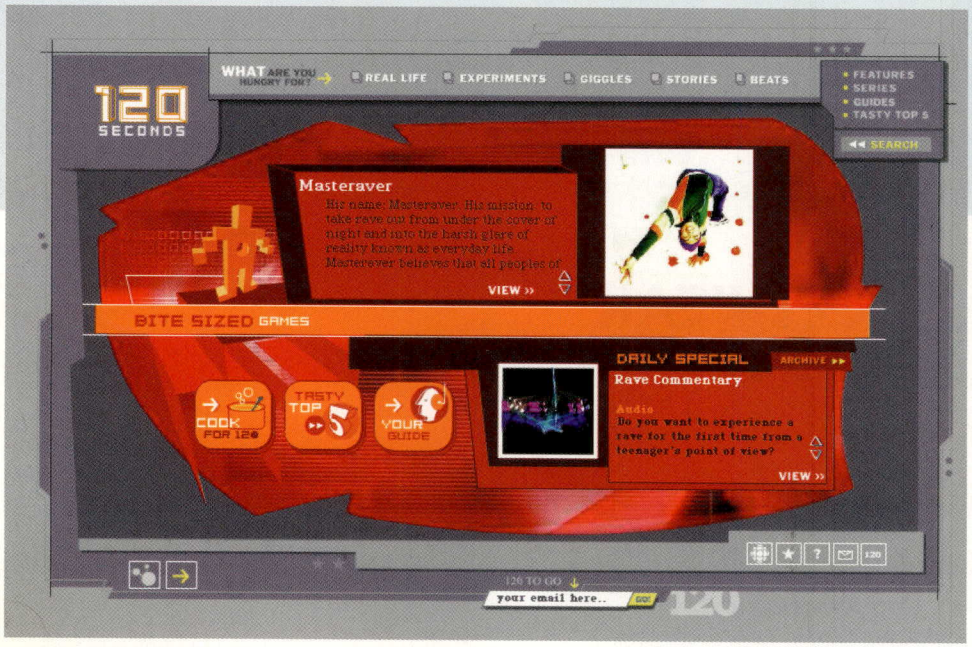
showcase

IN WHICH SOME OF THE WORLD'S MOST INVENTIVE AND ORIGINAL DESIGNERS SHOW OFF THEIR WARES



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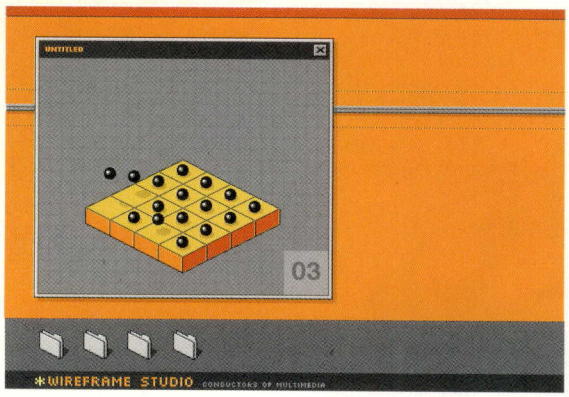

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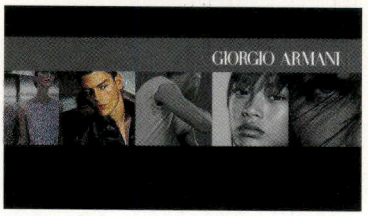

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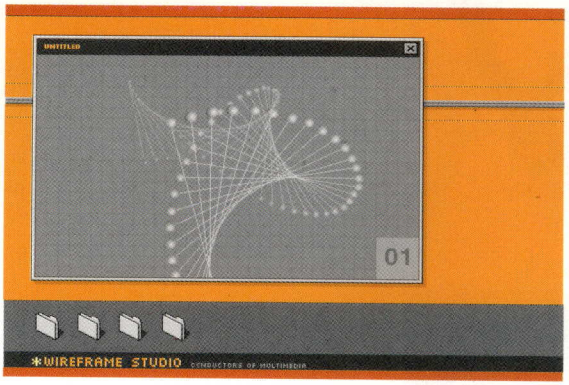

CosmicCupid.com
Cosmic Log In
Welcome to CosmicCupid's cyber love station - where the girl with the pink flares and the pigtails is your personal private eye...

4

1 DUE SOUTH

http://www.120seconds.com/index2.cfm by Inhouse

Apparently there's a lot more to Canada than the Rockies and Labatts Ice. Designed in *Flash*, 120 seconds is the latest in a series of initiatives launched by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation to create and support online content. And it's a bit different from the BBC. Running with the tagline "if it's original, compelling, sassy and Canadian it's on 120", the site is a clean blend of entertainment, stories, music and games.

2 AFRICA SHOCKS

www.wireframe.co.za
by Wireframe in-house

It's not often that you find Africa being written about in terms of technology, but new media house Wireframe looks set to challenge that perception. The company has recently begun the lengthy process of putting together a site full of experimental *Flash* work too. Wireframe, self-styled "conductors of multimedia", places particular emphasis on the manipulation of *Flash* animations in 3D space. There are further adventures for vectors in store, but the site is, as the designers put it, a 'work in progress'.

3 BY GIORGIO!

www.giorgioarmani.com
by Razorfish (www.razorfish.com)

Designed by Razorfish, the Armani site is developed extensively in *Flash* to give users an animated insight into the fashion clothing brand. Featuring a global store locator, user guestbook and cultural information on stylish cities across the world, giorgioarmani.com is essentially an umbrella site for the five separate lifestyle sites of the house of Armani: Emporio Armani, Armani Jeans, Armani Exchange, Armani Collezioni and Giorgio Armani itself. That might be more Armani's than you can shake a stick at, but it makes life a lot easier for fans of the Italian fashion guru.

4 HEART TO HEART

www.cosmiccupid.com
by ActiveIS (www.activeIS.net)

Looking for love can sure be a long, lonely search. But Cosmic Cupid, designed by ActiveIS, hopes to get you on the love superhighway in no time. The site is a Web flirting service, where you can send emails to people you like, complete with moods ranging from cheeky to romantic. There's an SMS service too (for sending text messages), as well as a notice board of the 'I saw you in a club in an orange shirt – call me', variety. Quirky illustration and a tiny touch of Java and JavaScript make sure that the site loads quickly without being terribly static and boring. Chatting someone up has never been this easy.

5 LINKING FOR LUNCH

www.lunchinabox.com

by in-house

How often do you find yourself hungry but with absolutely no idea what you'd like to eat? Galloping to your appetite's rescue is LunchInABox, a new lunch planner site designed by its patrons, Juliet Roberts and Alex Hallat. The site is full of ideas for lunch, from recipes to shopping for bibs and lunchboxes. There's even a news service full of, well, lunch inspired stories. Plus, every page is accompanied by a friendly *Flash*-animated mascot called Hoover. It can be slow to load, but its interface is lively enough to inspire you to try something besides soggy sarnies and last night's old pasta bows.

6 TAKING THE CREDIT

www.yuco.com

by in-house

A portfolio site for a California-based film credit company whose work includes *Saving Private Ryan*, *Enemy of the State* and *Arlington Road*, yuco.com is worth a look for its experiments with floating text alone. yU+co is the formula for a visceral experience born out of practical design problems according to the company who, apart from working in film, also produces logo ID animations and multimedia interactive kiosks.

7 DESIGNER FUN

www.isketch.net

by SP Production (www.spprod.se)

So you reckon that you know how to use *Illustrator*? Why not wow folks from around the world on this site, iSketch. It's an online game, a lot like Pictionary, using drawing tools and *Shockwave* rather than paper and pencil. You're given a word and then you have to draw it, without using any text. Others in the room have to guess the word by your illustration. For Web designers, especially if you're Wacom-equipped, it's an ideal forum to show off.

8 IT'S A SCAM

www.skam.co.uk

by Bubblemedia

The online presence of the Skam record label, skam.co.uk is a minimal site that takes an alternative approach to navigation. Sections of it are produced in braille with only audio rollovers to help. A *Flash* voice takes the place of button text and also informs you of what's happening on the site, such as 'loading' and 'track streaming'. She even pipes up during loading sequences: 'I'm going as fast as I can!'

The site also includes a graphic equaliser feature, a discography of EPs and a braille experimentation section. An ecommerce area is due to make an appearance soon.

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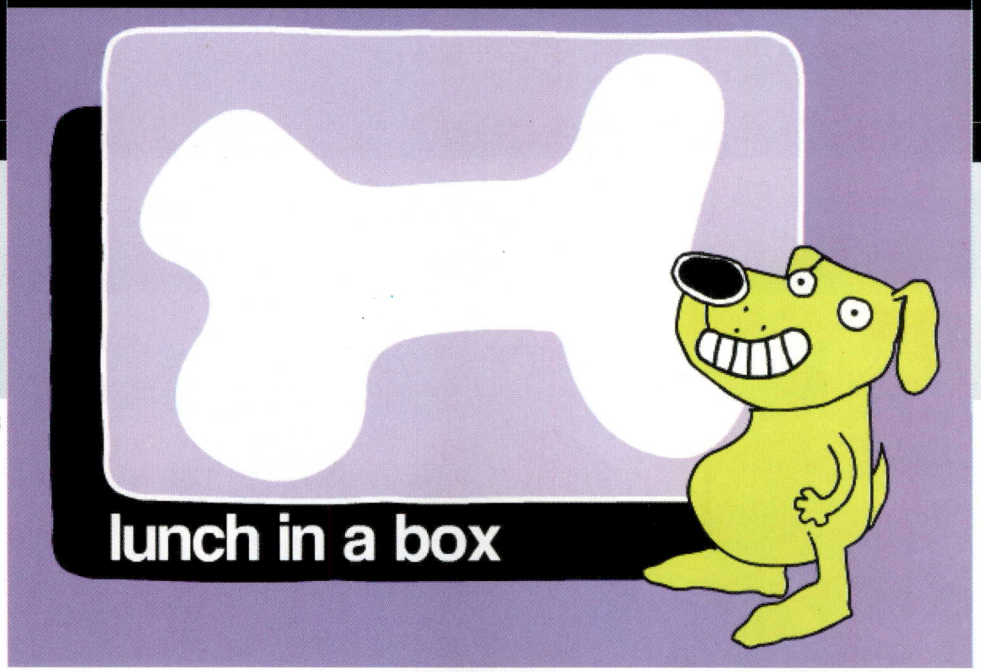

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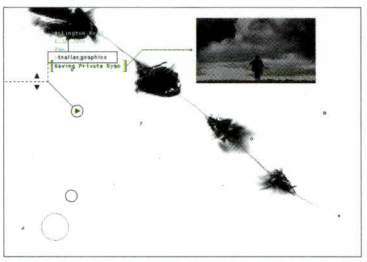

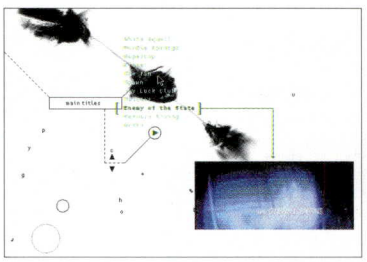

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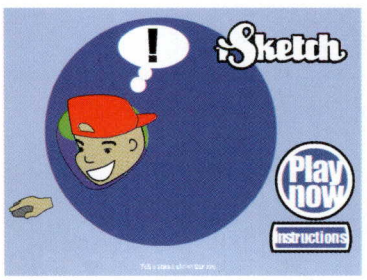

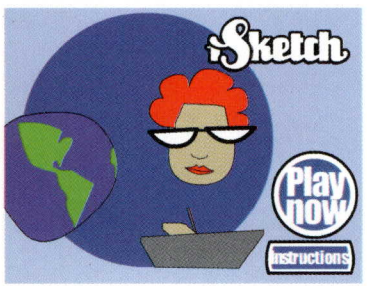

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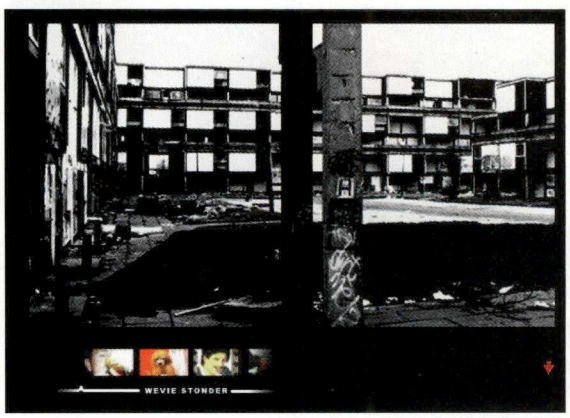

showcase

FROM ATTICA BLUES TO HARRY POTTER, WE LOOK AT THE SITES AT THE CUTTING EDGE OF WEB DESIGN

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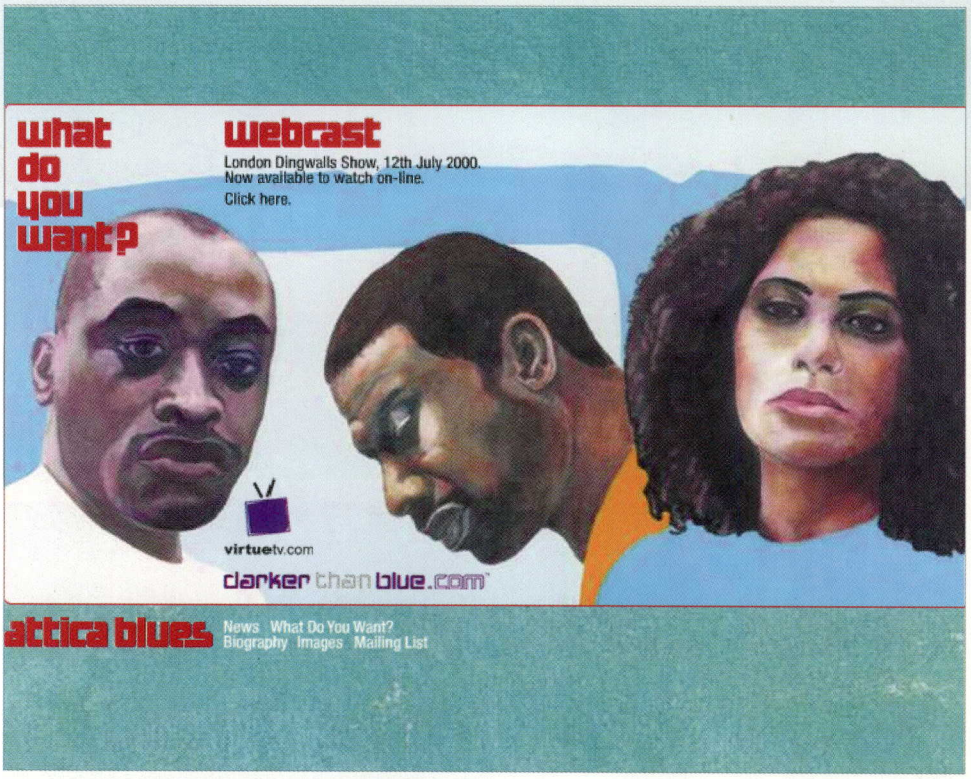

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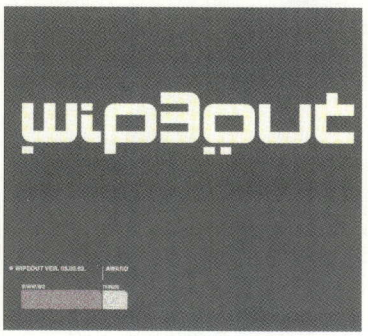

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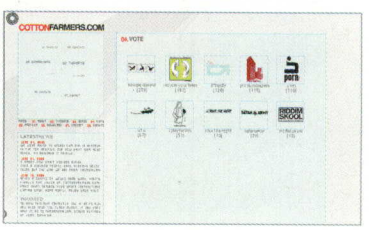
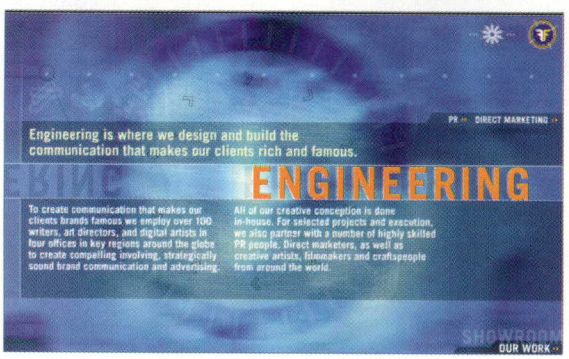



PR DIRECT MARKETING
Engineering is where we design and build the communication that makes our clients rich and famous.
ENGINEERING
To create communication that makes our clients brands famous we employ over 100 writers, art directors, and digital artists in four offices in key regions around the globe to create compelling involving, strategically sound brand communication and advertising.
All of our creative conception is done in-house. For selected projects and execution, we also partner with a number of highly skilled PR people, Direct marketers, as well as creative artists, filmmakers and craftspeople from around the world.
SHOWROOM
OUR WORK

9 MO' BETTER BLUES

www.atticablues.com
by Kleber (www.kleber.net)

In which ex-Mo' Wax-ers Attica Blues leaves behind the graffiti stylings of its former record label, and attempts to carve out a new look for itself online. The cover art for its latest album forms the background of the site, and the patches of unprimed canvas give the pages a raw, handmade look. Minimal use of animation draws the eye neatly around the screen, but the scroll bars are spindly and difficult to operate. Nevertheless, an interesting site, and one which proves that visual texture is not the sole preserve of traditional designers.

10 FAME FACTORY

www.bartleboglehegarty.com
by one9ine (www.one9ine.com)

"To succeed, a brand needs FAME," the splendidly named Bartle Bogle Hegarty assure us. "Without FAME, a brand will die." Those hyperbolic capitals give the game away, since this site is really just a bit of online back-slapping: a run-down of all the ad agency's greatest hits. Accordingly, everything is animated to the max, and *Flash* as hell – if it can pop up, spin round, or zoom out, it will. A cynic might say that the site is fussy, and visually thin – but as an interactive experience, it's undeniably impressive.

11 THE GAMES PEOPLE PLAY

www.wipeout3.com by Kleber (www.kleber.net)

The designers of the Wipeout 3 website couldn't have had an easy task. As an online rendering of the Psygnosis game that picked up an Interactive Bafta for best design, Kleber had its work cut out to match such high standards. Thankfully, it doesn't disappoint. A futuristic feeling project, the majority of the content is in-depth information on the game: how to play it, the chance to listen to tracks featured, and a visually stunning and highly detailed team section. Enabling users to download a screensaver continues the theme offline.

12 STOCKHOLM MONSTERS

www.cottonfarmers.com
by CottonFarmers inhouse

Cotton Farming (noun, slang): Web design from the grass roots. CottonFarmers is, or rather are, four young Scandinavian new media types. The Internet is its shop window, and the cotton in question is designer clothing. The team's English may not be brilliant, but the t-shirts are, and so, to a lesser extent, is the website. Some of the layout seems to have been done in haste, but the site makes good use of brutally cropped thumbnail images, and a main menu which turns the page titles into a rotating cloud of text. All-in-all, a promising start.

13 HI-NRG

users.bart.nl/ ~juse

by JUSE (dajuse@hotmail.com)

Web design: it's all a matter of proportion. Most sites opt for a monitor-shaped 5:4 aspect ratio, but this Dutch e-zine (more properly known as erg!, and dedicated to the noble art of BMX) favours a more slimline 3:1 format. All of which creates a lot of blank space above and below the active region, which you can fill by activating pop-up windows. Take into account the visual interest created by cropping images, along with a bit of mouseover action, and you've got a nifty site.

14 MINIMAXIMAL

www.vasava.es

by Vasava Artworks inhouse

Small is beautiful, as far as Vasava is concerned. Confounding the belief that the mobile Internet will never be a designer's medium, this Spanish agency's 'Mini Web' site runs in a 6x6cm window. Use of salmon-pink and a kind of slate-grey softens what would otherwise be monochrome graphics, while the site's elegant miniature fonts are available in postscript form. After all this minimalism, it almost seems a shame to add colour, but Vasava manages that, too. A glimpse of a brighter future.

15 AGE OF THE TRAIN

www.c2c-online.co.uk

by Liquid Light

(www.liquidlight.co.uk)

Railways and all things rail-related are a bit of a British design classic. While c2c-online probably isn't quite in this league, the UK train operator's website does boast some forceful graphic design, and a clear, uncluttered layout. The overall feel is surprisingly youthful, given the (presumably) mainstream audience, with a striking colour scheme and some adventure-sports-type photography. Links to local events, such as the V2000 festival, add interest, and there's even a *Shockwave* game.

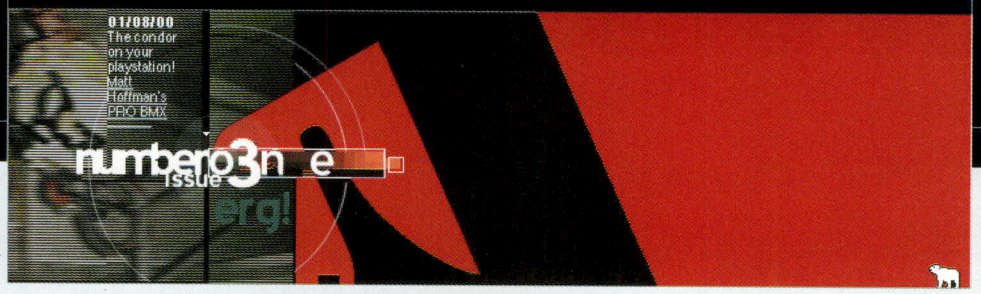
16 OLD HARRY'S GAME

www.bloomsbury.com/ harrypotter

by Lateral (www.lateral.net)

One site, two sets of users. That's the problem which faced the designers of Harry Potter's online home. On the one hand, you have the kids: on the other, their parents – and their cash. Lateral's solution is to split the site in two: one half for young wizards (with a password-protection system to keep nosy adults out), and the other half for the rest of us. The homepage also hijacks all the traffic off the rest of Bloomsbury's site: a smart, if slightly mercenary move. ■

TEXT: **GRAEME AYMER, KEITH DREW, JIM THACKER**



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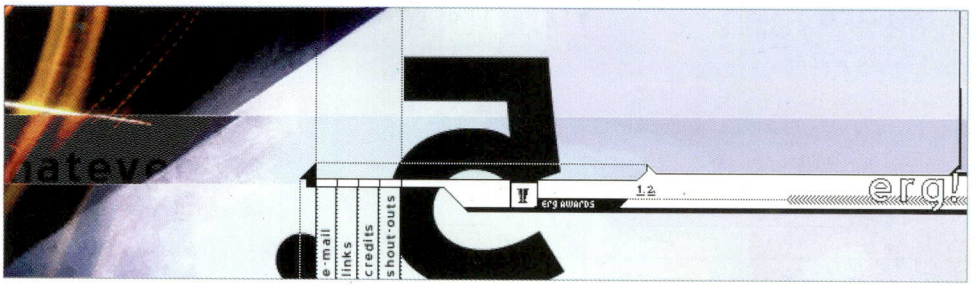

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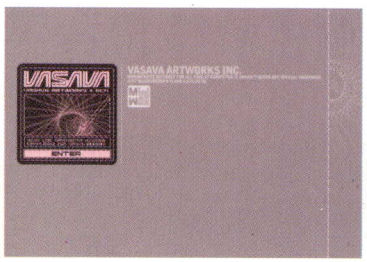

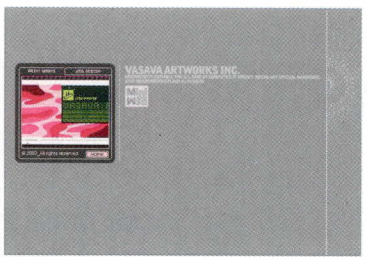

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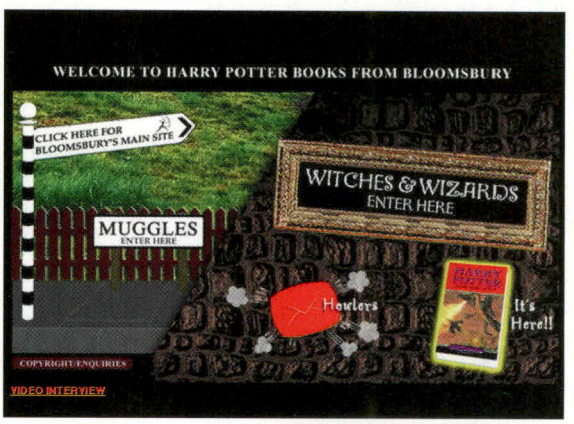

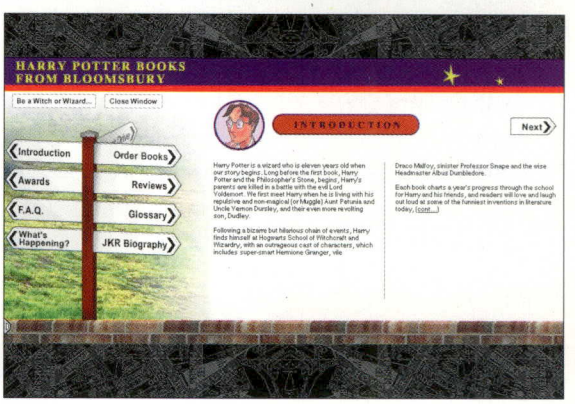

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BIG BROTH

www.channel4.com/bigbrother

BIG BROTHER IS A VOYEURISTIC EXPERIMENT IN MASS ENTERTAINMENT. IT IS ALSO A GLOBAL PRODUCT, A CROSS-MEDIA TRENDSETTER, AND A MAJOR BRANDING EXERCISE FOR CHANNEL 4

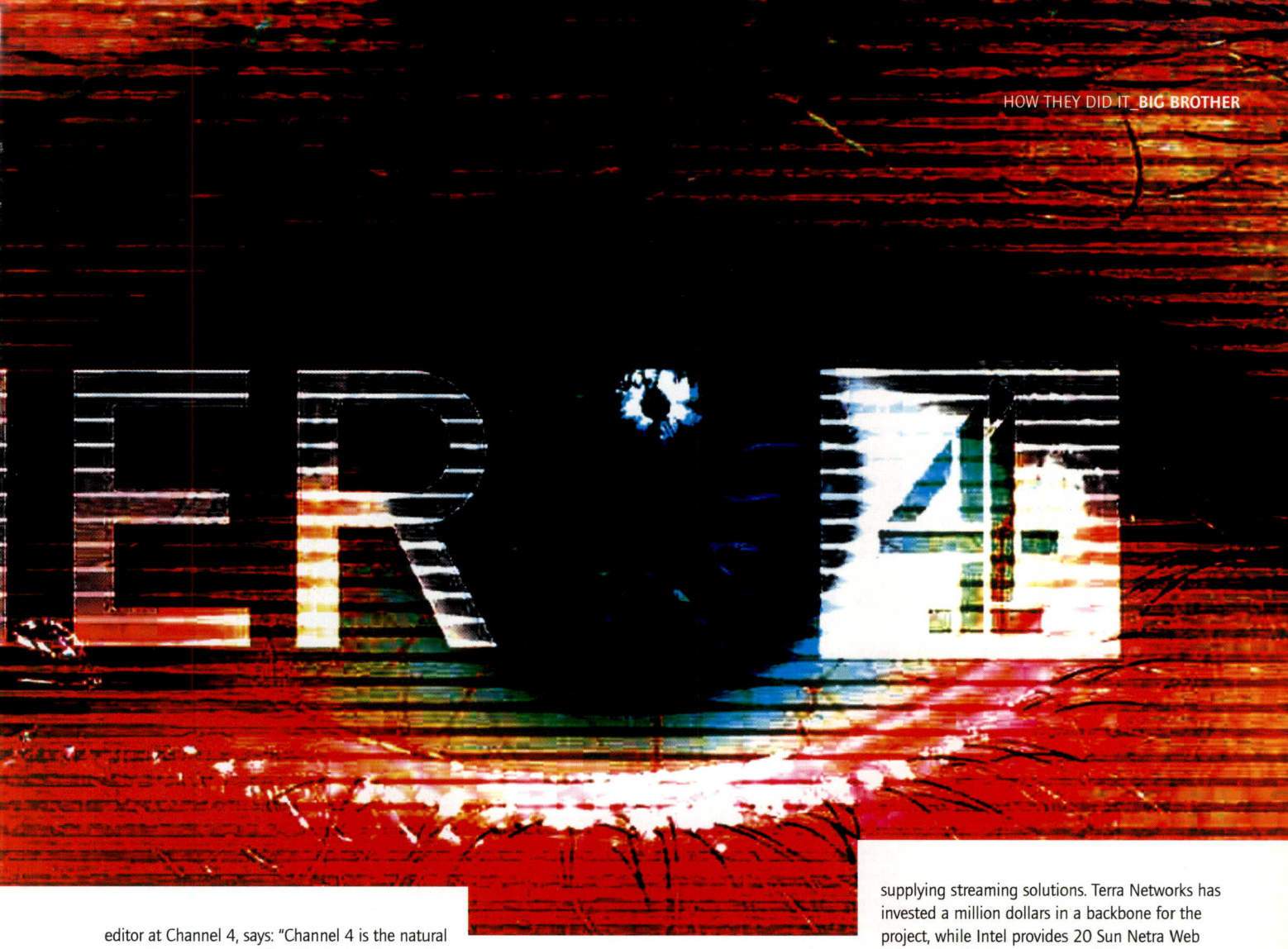
FACT FILE
SITE: www.channel4.com/bigbrother
PARENT COMPANY: Channel 4
DESIGNERS: Victoria Real
PURPOSE: Mass entertainment and branding exercise
TECHNOLOGY: Real G2 SureStream, Real Trade, Oracle
DEVELOPMENT TIME: 7 months
WENT LIVE: 14 July 2000

If you're not aware of the phenomenon that is *Big Brother*, chances are you've been wandering about wearing earplugs and a blindfold for the last couple of months. Part docu-soap, part social experiment, part voyeuristic titillation, the widely-publicised show places ten willing and psychologically-vetted inmates (okay, contestants) in a purpose-built house for nine weeks, surrounded by 26 cameras. Operating 24/7, the cameras cover the contestants' every move – whether they're chilling out, sleeping, or performing bizarre group activities requested by Big Brother. The winner, who will emerge £70,000 richer, is the person who lasts the longest in the house without being evicted by fellow inmates and the TV viewers, who have the casting vote as to who stays and goes.

Aside from being a successful exercise in mass entertainment, *Big Brother* will have a lasting impact on TV in the UK. Unlike previous 'fly-on-the-wall' programmes, *Big Brother* is a true cross-media project, incorporating TV and the Internet, rather than using the Web as a static promotional tool. Live online coverage started Friday 14 July when contestants were seen settling into the *Big Brother* house, four days ahead of the series starting on Channel 4. Television and Internet coverage will continue round the clock until September, when a winner is announced and the show concludes. The fact that viewers can fully involve themselves with the show by voting for evictions, monitoring webcams and suggesting activities for the contestants gives *Big Brother* an unprecedented level of interactivity. It is a UK television first – although various shows have previously opted for the peeping tom/surveillance TV format without the interactive element.

GLOBAL BROTHER

Big Brother is a tried and tested global brand. A product of GMG Endemol Entertainment, *Big Brother* launched in 1999 on the Dutch Veronica channel, becoming the second most watched programme in Holland that year. The open-minded Dutch were receptive to the format, and the figures certainly didn't fall when two contestants became 'intimate' on camera. The show then ran in the US, Spain and Germany. The German *Big Brother* website (www.bigbrother-haus.de) became one of the most visited browser locations in Europe, averaging 3.5 million page views a day. Inevitably, *Big Brother* came to UK shores, as Channel 4 saw the potential of adapting the concept and brand for a British audience. Liz Warner, commissioning



editor at Channel 4, says: "Channel 4 is the natural home for a programme like *Big Brother*. Interactive, technologically advanced and unique – not to mention compelling and highly entertaining TV."

After licensing *Big Brother* for the UK, Channel 4 commissioned production company Bazal to produce the TV show, with a third party to develop the website. Chris Short at Bazal explains: "We were determined that the website should have the same production values as the TV show, so we wanted people with TV experience to run it. The website needed to be a 24-hour extension of the TV programme, as the two are designed to drive audiences to each other. They are mutually important in terms of branding the project."

MAKING IT REAL

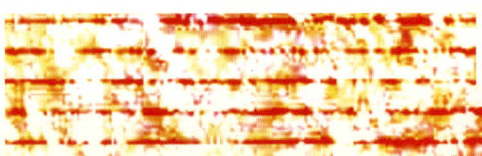
Shortly before Christmas 1999, Brighton-based Victoria Real, a specialist in interactive TV and ecommerce solutions, was brought in as the creative force behind the site. Mark Baynes, Victoria Real executive producer, says: "We carry out a huge amount of interactive work and this fit with our existing projects. We were briefed quite loosely to incorporate the *Big Brother* global brand within a website and achieve a look that fit with Channel 4's audience. We were encouraged to break new ground. After all, *Big Brother* is the first mass TV interactive event: an exercise in reality TV."

After initial meetings with Channel 4, a 25-strong development team at Victoria Real got its collective teeth into the site. Out of a six-month production schedule, four months were allocated to planning and two to building and maintenance. Says Baynes: "Planning was the key process, as a project of this scale had not been implemented in the UK before and the site is the tip of an iceberg. It involves lots of technology that users never see." The project also puts a lot of strain on the technology behind it because of the sheer popularity of *Big Brother*. The result is what's known as a 'flash site' – where millions of visitors appear overnight and disappear when the main event is over, making provision of bandwidth a real issue. Baynes adds: "We've been told several times that the *Big Brother* site could take down the UK Internet, as 20-30 per cent of traffic could relate to our bandwidth demands."

To ensure that everything would run smoothly, without descending into the Internet equivalent of the M4 during rush hour, it was vital to have solid technology partners for the site. Terra Networks, a division of Spanish telecoms giant Telefonica S.A., is responsible for hosting the site, Intel for providing secure servers, and Real Networks for supplying streaming solutions. Terra Networks has invested a million dollars in a backbone for the project, while Intel provides 20 Sun Netra Web servers that live in a secure 'Web farm'. True to predictions, Channel4.com experienced a 500 per cent surge in Web traffic when *Big Brother* went live. The *Big Brother* site attracts 2.5-3 million page impressions a day (although getting to the site is still difficult for many would-be users), while viewing figures for the TV show stand at 4.5 million, comparable to the audience for Ginger Media's *TFI Friday*.

SITE LIFE

Upon entering the 'cameras' section of the site, visitors can watch live footage of the contestants in Real Network's G2 format, choosing between six feeds that stream output from 26 cameras in the *Big Brother* house after it has been encoded from PAL TV signals. From the 'news' section, visitors can participate in opinion polls and suggest activities for the contestants (anyone for naked Twister?). News stories about the contestants, written by Bazal's editorial team, appear on the site, after being uploaded automatically by Victoria Real's content management system, and tend to take a sardonic tone designed to whip up public opinion. ➤



Visitors can have *Big Brother* news delivered by email or mobile phone, in case they miss an installment of the show. If they join the *Big Brother* Club, they can access two dedicated cameras, view 'unusual' photo galleries and read special daily updates.

According to Baynes, the UK *Big Brother* site's lifespan is likely to be short. When the show finishes in September, the Web content may be taken down to avoid unnecessary bandwidth consumption. Meanwhile, the site provides an ideal launch pad for spin-off activities, a fact noticed by its investors. GMG Endemol is using the *Big Brother* brand to focus activity in areas provided by its commercial partners. For example, people can bet on the outcome of the show through online betting service, Flutter (www.flutter.com). Even if the UK site disappears without a trace, a *Big Brother* worldwide portal is planned to give fans a new Web fix. Eventually, 20 countries will be running simultaneous *Big Brother* programmes – so the audience potential for a portal is immense.

DIGITAL FUTURES

Within the world of UK television, rival producers will look at the *Big Brother* format as a new direction, and copycat shows are likely to mushroom. Channel 4 will be pleased it got there first. Says Baynes: "Channel 4 is the leading organisation in Europe pioneering new interactive formats. *Big Brother* is key, as Channel 4 sets a new standard that everyone will choose to meet." He believes people will want to interact with TV programmes on a much wider scale as the uptake of digital services grows: "The number of people who have digital services isn't there yet, but this will change. The technology simply needs to catch up with our vision."

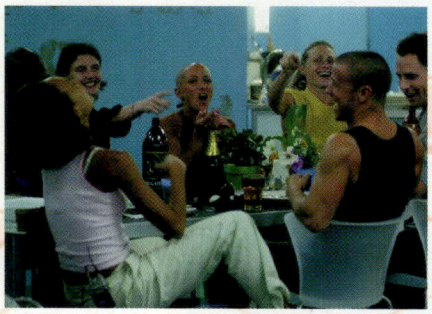
Chris Short emphasises the importance of mixed media: "*Big Brother* is the first in a genre of joint broadcasting projects. It's not just a case of driving a product into the viewer's house using TV. With streaming technologies, anyone can be a broadcaster, putting the power into the hands of the people with great ideas. Distribution and revenue streams go way beyond the actual TV programme. *Big Brother* shows that there's a different way to make money other than pure TV exploitation."

If you thought *Big Brother* was just a bunch of exhibitionists having fun in a house, look again. Love it or hate it, the chances are you'll increasingly see concepts like it appearing on a screen near you.

TEXT: **JO CHIPCHASE**

DEVELOPMENT & LOGISTICAL HIGHLIGHTS

VICTORIA REAL BROUGHT THE ALL-SEEING, ALL-KNOWING *BIG BROTHER* SITE TO LIFE USING SIMPLE NAVIGATION AND POWERFUL CONTENT MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGY



1_ DESIGN FACTORS

From the drawing board onwards, Victoria Real recognised that the *Big Brother* site had to be simple and quick to download. "The site is designed to attract people to the Internet for the first time," says Baynes. "We don't use any Java applets, the site is easy to navigate and there are no real gimmicks. It's important that the server doesn't have to do more work than necessary, to save bandwidth." Accordingly, Victoria Real chose to use flat HTML, rather than dynamically-generated content, to take the strain off the server.

Flying in the face of current Web design convention, they chose to use frames as an additional bandwidth-saving tactic. Baynes explains: "We normally have a rule of not using them but, in this case, we had to have a basic frameset for commercial reasons. The frameset means that users load banner advertisements and the navigation system only once when viewing the site." The *Big Brother* site is also one of a growing number of sites to use a full-screen design, rather than a fixed table width, to cater for all browser resolutions.

2_INTERNET ENGINEERING

The *Big Brother* online project was not just a case of building a site. As Baynes points out, it's a large system that requires lots of "Internet engineering". For starters, *Big Brother* is using one of the most secure data centres in Europe. Several PCs at the *Big Brother* house at Bromley-by-Bow communicate with Intel's data centre in Berkshire (lovingly referred to as 'Star Treks' by Intel, as it looks as if you're on the bridge of *Voyager*, apparently). Twenty Sun Netra servers are located in different parts of the facilty, so even an earthquake or nuclear disaster wouldn't take them all out. Then there's the huge amount of streaming work undertaken with Real Networks.

Streams go from the *Big Brother* house via two separate phone exchanges in Berkshire, through Intel's date centre, and into Terra/Real's operations. Freeserve and Demon are also handling streams to bring them closer to the user. "This is the Hollywood effect," says Baynes. "There's a large investment by the major players to push content to the users – like Hollywood pushing content into cinemas through its distribution channel."

3_THE CAMS

In the *Big Brother* house, 26 traditional TV cameras are dotted around in various locations, including the bathroom (although the footage from that particular device can't be broadcast to the public – it simply exists to prevent the contestants from plotting in the smallest room). The production team, which is based in a TV studio behind the house, selects six feeds to be webcast at any one time. PAL TV signals from the six cameras go out to six encoding PCs – also in the *Big Brother* house – where they are converted into Real G2 SureStream format and sent out through the Intel and Real operations. Website visitors can view the footage streamed at 28/56kbps on narrowband (modems) and will soon be able to view it at 300kbps on broadband (ADSL). The footage from two cameras is reserved for people who have registered online for the *Big Brother* Club, and is encoded at 80K.

4_CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

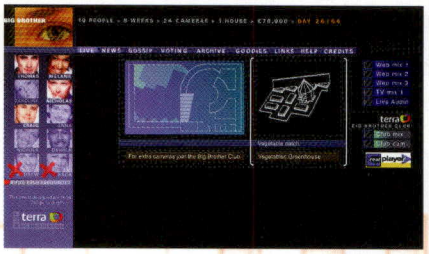
Victoria Real has designed a content management system (CMS) that allows Bazal's editorial team at the *Big Brother* house to create and upload news and gossip about the contestants easily. The editorial team has 12-15 members working in shifts – and it would be impractical if they were all producing HTML pages and then squabbling over who uses FTP software first. According to Mark Baynes, they simply "press a few buttons" and the new content appears on the site automatically. The back end of the CMS uses Real Trade – a proprietary system originally developed by Victoria Real for ecommerce purposes. "It's an extended application server," explains Baynes. "Basically, it's an intranet with hardware from Dell and proprietary software that we moved up to the *Big Brother* house."

5_MARKETING PROMOTION

Big Brother is a venture that makes use of all available media – as would any major brand. Rather than relying on the website and TV show to promote themselves, a marketing campaign was implemented to capture the attention of the target audience before the event started. Using a tactic with an underground feel, *Big Brother* invested in a flyposting campaign throughout the UK, which started a couple of weeks before the show. Raising the profile further, giant screens in Leicester Square and Manchester were used, as were TV 'blipverts' featuring the *Big Brother* eyes. A poster campaign took place in big cities and prime locations, including Victoria Station. "We made the Web traffic peak quickly," says Baynes.

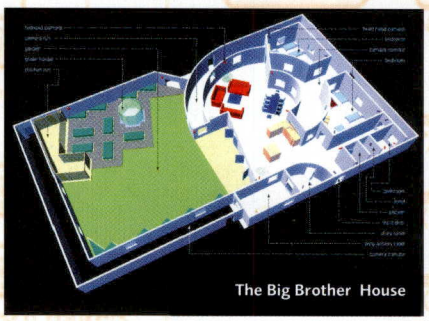
"WE WERE DETERMINED THE WEBSITE SHOULD HAVE THE SAME PRODUCTION VALUES AS THE TV SHOW, SO WE WANTED PEOPLE WITH TV EXPERIENCE TO RUN IT. THE SITE NEEDED TO BE A 24-HOUR EXTENSION OF THE TV PROGRAMME"

CHRIS SHORT, BAZAL

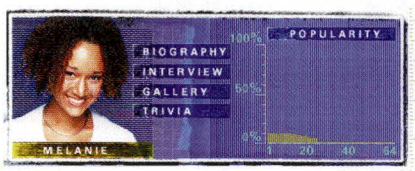


From 26 webcams, 6 feeds are available at the site.

The changing fortunes of the contestants are tracked.



The full-screen design caters to all browsers.



A content management system updates contestant information on a frequent basis.

You'll find all the latest news for the show – including the antics of Nasty Nick – right here. He was still a house resident at the time of going to press...

6_VOTING

Despite great expectations in this area, the *Big Brother* site did not launch with the facility for visitors to cast their eviction votes online (the first TV installments asked viewers to vote by telephone). Channel 4 was anxious about the potential for hacker attacks and the casting of multiple votes, and didn't want to launch an online voting system unless it proved to be totally secure. An email voting system and downloadable voting software were both considered and rejected. During early August 2000, Channel 4 was thinking of using a new system for disguised telephone voting, under which a piece of software redirects the user's ISP connection for the time it takes to vote and then back again. None of the previous *Big Brother* sites in Europe or the US have incorporated online eviction voting so, if implemented, this would be a first for Channel 4.

Eviction voting aside, as part of the site's content management system, visitors can cast topical votes on issues such as "do you think Andrew stands a chance of getting off with Mel?" They can also cast popularity votes for contestants. Using an Oracle database that examines the visitors' email addresses, the votes are automatically compiled into graphs showing each contestant's popularity and indicating who the viewers would like to lose.

7_BROADBAND BROADCASTING VISIONS

Big Brother was originally planned as the first broadband broadcast. As the roll-out of ADSL has been delayed (cheers, BT), the plan wasn't entirely possible. "When we start encoding at 300K, the quality will be hugely better – almost TV-like," says Baynes. "People will be able to view the webcast at half-screen layout and the images will look good, even when people are moving." He adds that the future will involve embedding interactivity into the screen – although this depends on the DSL roll-out for consumers, and the European Internet backbone having a higher capacity. However long it takes, full-scale convergence is inevitable. ■

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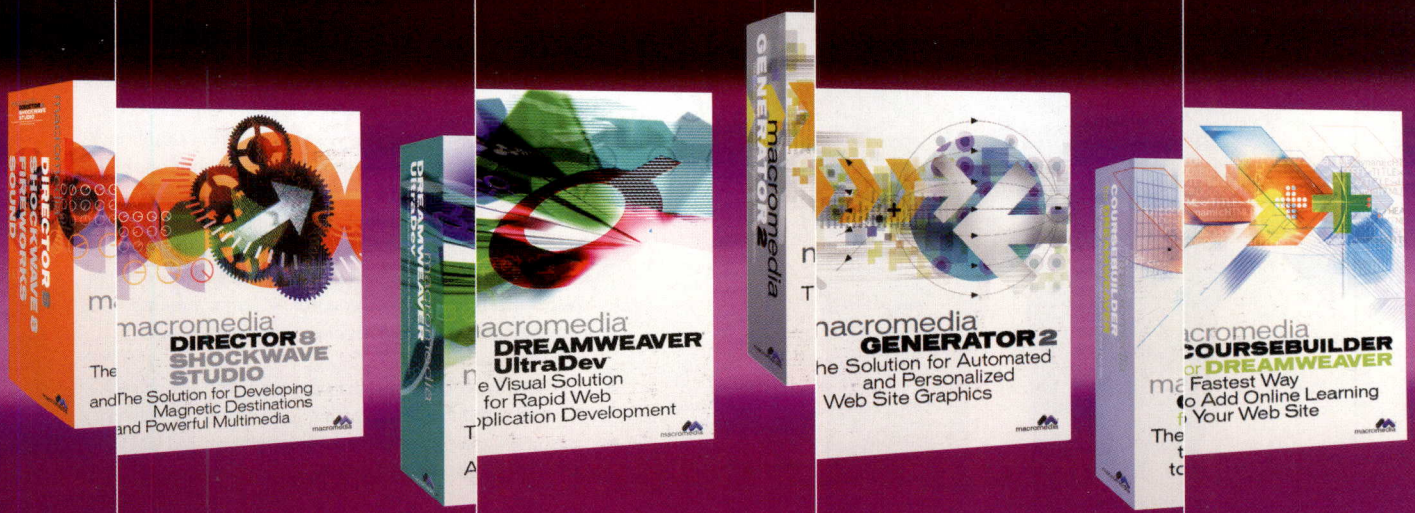

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Ericsson's marketing director Steve Walker predicts a bright future for next generation WAP, and sees 3G entering our worlds in around two years time.

waiting for 3G

3G PHONE TECHNOLOGY IS SET TO RADICALLY CHANGE THE WAY WE USE OUR MOBILES. A GROUP OF TOP DESIGNERS QUIZ ERICSSON TO DISCOVER THE IMPLICATIONS FOR AGENCIES

We're about to enter a new generation of mobile Internet services. It is 3G, or UMTS, which is capable of transferring data at rates starting at 384kbps in 2002, eventually rising to 2mbps. Presently, using GSM, any data you transfer only moves at a rate of 9.6kbps. That's some leap. The holy grail here is the ability to have simultaneous voice and data transfer at high bandwidth, meaning transfer of still and motion graphics and high quality audio, among other applications.

In the meantime, though, there's GPRS, which will enable WAP phones to transfer at rates of between 64kbps-144kbps, though the lower end of that scale seems most realistic.

The public is already hungry for data transfer: in December 1999, there were 271million SMS messages sent across UK mobile networks. In May this year, there were 500million. By the year end, the monthly figure could be as high as one billion.

If you can combine this willingness to transfer data with rich media services, both for business and for consumer entertainment, you realise why companies like Ericsson are taking mobile telephony very seriously indeed.

What that means to you, potentially, is new streams of business, and new avenues of creativity. But it's a complicated affair.

That's why we got a number of agency professionals to discuss the mobile Internet with a specialist: Steve Walker, Ericsson's Marketing director third generation and UMTS in the UK. Highlights of the discussion follow…

THE PLAYERS

TERESA HORSCROFT Roger Staton Associates PR
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NEIL ROBINSON AKQA
GILES SMITH, marketing director, TGM
DUNCAN 'DOUGIE' WILSON, creative director, One Bad Monkey
DOMENIC O'BRIEN, convergence designer, Gluemedia
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ROBERT METTLER, production director, Ogilvy interactive
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JASON BINNS, technical project manager, design.net
STEVEN WALKER, marketing director, third generation and UMTS, Ericsson UK
GRAEME AYMER, news editor, *Cre@teOnline*

STEVE WALKER: "What does third generation mean? What are the types of services we're going to see? What are you going to design for?

"We group these services into three key areas. The first is what I call mobile Internet. This is about people having access to info when they're mobile, delivered in many cases via the Internet.

"Very few of us have got time to surf when we're out and about. We're probably doing something else: driving, shopping, working. We can only give so much of our attention to our mobile device.

"Specific pieces of information that people need to help them make decisions or to simply entertain them are the kinds of things that we think are going to be delivered via the mobile Internet."

JUSTIN THOMAS-COPELAND: "The average mobile phone user just picks up and dials the number and that's about it. Especially when you talk about 3G. As a technology provider, what are you doing to help it to become mass market?"

STEVE WALKER: "There's going to be a lot more use of voice recognition. Today, voice recognition in phones is quite simple: up to ten numbers. By the end of the year, you'll be able to navigate around your phone menu using your voice. And you'll see a lot more applications like that too."

JUSTIN THOMAS-COPELAND: "Just recently, I was reading something about I-Mode coming into Europe. As an issue, do you think that's important as far as the adoption of 3G services go?"

STEVE WALKER: "I don't: it's proprietary, and a particular network might decide it will take some variant of I-Mode to implement on its own network. If it was to do that, it'd be incompatible with networks around it.

"The other thing is that I-Mode and WAP are converging. By 2002, they'll be using the same xHTML-based programming language. There's the WML programming language in WAP today, HTML is progressing towards xHTML, which is an XML language. HTML and WML will converge on that same language, and I-Mode will converge on that same language. So they will be compatible."

NEIL ROBINSON: "As an insight into the development of this technology, what are consumers in Japan using these services for?"

STEVE WALKER: "I'm led to believe that the highest selling application is downloading screensavers to your phone everyday. People are sending pictures."

GILES SMITH: "There is a good market in the way that content can be constructed. They're tiny little good things to have."

STEVE WALKER: "It's because people have thought about what the mobile user wants. They haven't just gone 'I've got this service on my PC; I'll just try and rewrite it in WML and put it on the mobile'. They've asked what is it that utilises the capability of this type of device.

WHEN GPRS MEETS WAP

STEVE WALKER: "GPRS is only the first step: getting packets of data to the phone quicker. GPRS on its own doesn't really do anything, though. Data has no value to anybody. It's only valuable when its turned into some sort of service. And that's what WAP does.

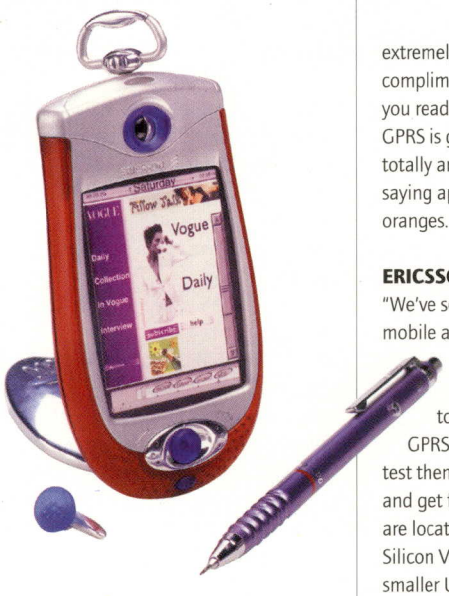
"By the end of this year, we'll have WAP1.2.1 which has full ecommerce security. We plan to implement that in phones that come out at the end of this year, and that will erase some of the problems today that come up with using WAP for ecommerce or m-commerce type transactions.

"During next year, we will have the facility for 'large file transfer' within WAP1.3. This also coincides with 'multimedia messaging', which then enables us to do things like sending video clips. WAP will have that capability next year.

"In 2002, we'll have WAP2.0 which will take full account of all these capabilities and converge together with HTML. This means you'll have this one common language and that websites can, as I understand it, be rescripted almost in real-time. So you can have a filter that just plucks out percentages of an xHTML Web page and downloads it to a mobile device. WAP, in combination with GPRS, is

A host of industry experts grilled Steve Walker, Ericsson's marketing director, on 3G, WAP and the plans for the future of Web and mobile communications.

"IF YOU HEAR THAT GPRS IS GOING TO REPLACE WAP, THEN IT'S WRONG: THE TWO COMPLIMENT EACH OTHER"



"GPRS SERVICES ARE COMING NEXT YEAR, AND MULTIMEDIA MESSAGING WILL BE AROUND THEN TOO"

STEVE WALKER, ERICSSON

extremely powerful; the two really compliment each other well. So if you read anywhere in the press that GPRS is going to replace WAP, it is totally and utterly wrong. That's like saying apples are going to replace oranges. It ain't true."

ERICSSON INITIATIVES

"We've set up something called the mobile applications initiative (MAI). This is a pre-verification environment for companies to develop applications for GPRS, UMTS and so on, and then test them in a secure environment and get full written analysis. There are locations in Stockholm and Silicon Valley, but there is now a smaller UK centre which can be contacted by the Web, so you can test applications. We also have a developer zone on our website which has SDKs and information on Bluetooth and other technology."

JUSTIN THOMAS-COPELAND: "On the developer zone, and the MAI, are either of those organisations actively talking to agencies so we can start to get that ball rolling? Otherwise we're going to be in a sort of Catch 22."

STEVE WALKER: "Those initiatives are open to any organisation to become a part of. I wouldn't say Ericsson is going out of its way to talk to agencies, just like we're not going out of our way to talk to any particular market sector. But if any of the agencies or organisations you're in sign up, then we're happy to provide that info to anybody.

"I agree that it's something we should be doing a lot more, but it has to come from your side as well."

GRAEME AYMER: "In terms of compatibility between different handsets, if you think about the Web, different operating systems use different colours and so on. Is it the case that Ericsson handsets and Nokia handsets will be able to share colours in the same way?"

STEVE WALKER: "Absolutely. You should be able to access the same service irrespective of certain manufacturers' handsets. Of course, there may be advantages to having Ericsson handsets; we might have a slightly better way of doing something than a Nokia handset within the device..."

'DOUGIE' WILSON: "In terms of things like video delivery, what kind of file formats are we looking at?"

STEVE WALKER: "There's a lot of work going on in MPEG 4. It's not complete yet; we're still some way from fully completing the work that we need to standardise video delivery across mobile networks."

DUNCAN WILSON: "Is there any support for any multimedia functionary, like *Flash*?"

STEVE WALKER: "I know Ericsson and Symbian (a platform for running wireless devices which is run by Ericsson, Nokia, Motorola, Panasonic and Psion) are doing quite a lot of work to see how they can use their functionality with some products. But again, it's a little early to say for sure."

GRAEME AYMER: (To everyone in the room): "Is this something you are really trying to get into? In six months, one year or two?"

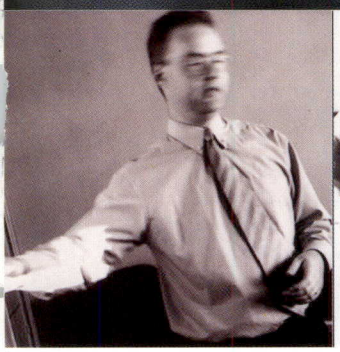
JUSTIN THOMAS-COPELAND: "Because of the nature and speed of the industry, as an agency, we're already thinking about this. We're already on the learning curve, and we're already talking to clients.

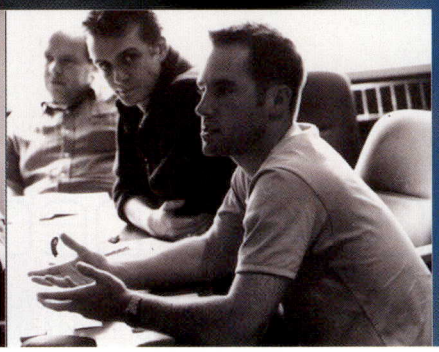
"That's why I was asking about the applications, and how we can kick-start it. I think it's more up to the agency than the clients to kick-start the betas and get people up to speed, getting them to understand usability and all these other issues."

NEIL ROBINSON: "Our concern is brand consistency across different channels. Things are moving so fast. We're talking to clients now about restructuring databases."

GRAEME AYMER: "That's why I asked about the colour. You've got interactive television, you've got Mac and PC, now you've got all these other little devices. It sounds like an opportunity, but it also sounds like a nightmare."

JUSTIN THOMAS-COPELAND: "I think it depends on the interface and how that develops. But at the early stages, a lot of brand values are going to be communicated in the application, through the service you develop, rather than look and feel. Because look and feel isn't going to be there yet, and that's something you're going to have to accept. It's going to be about being clever in the application."





NEIL ROBINSON: "Despite all the publicity now surrounding WAP, there's still a huge amount of scepticism of the service in our industry. Do you feel you'll have a more difficult marketing test, to prove the value of new services, especially as people have already dismissed WAP to a certain degree?"

STEVE WALKER: "I do get a little frustrated, because what people are doing is measuring the underlying technology, rather than measuring the services which will be deployed by the technology. WAP is in its absolute infancy – I'm sure in the first days of petrol engines, people said, 'Oh, petrol engines: what a load of rubbish', because they hadn't seen a car.

"As soon as someone put the petrol engine in a car, and said you'll be able to get around 100 times faster than you do today, people said: 'Wow, that's fantastic'. There's so much media attention on the telecomms industry, and the press are jumping on things very early and knocking them before they've had a chance to be used."

JASON BINNS: "That's going to be like a step away from traditional Web design, almost harking back to the days of true software design. It's all going to be on the server, like a thin client approach."

STEVE WALKER: "I think you're right. People will want very specific services, like a banking service with one button. They won't want to have to load up a browser and then go to a page that's their bank. They won't want to type www. – who's going to type all that rubbish into their phone?"

GILES: "One of my clients said the other day said it's a bit like playing *Tomb Raider*, getting to the final level and discovering *Pac Man*.

"They're very standoff-ish because they know the hype. And that's something to work through because it's something we want to get into."

STEVE WALKER: "Again, I think one of the reasons for that is that people are in the mindset, for whatever reason, that whatever they can see here on a PC screen, presented to them as lovely colour, large screen, is exactly what will be presented to them on a mobile phone screen. And they will have the same services. They haven't thought through that they might not need the same services."

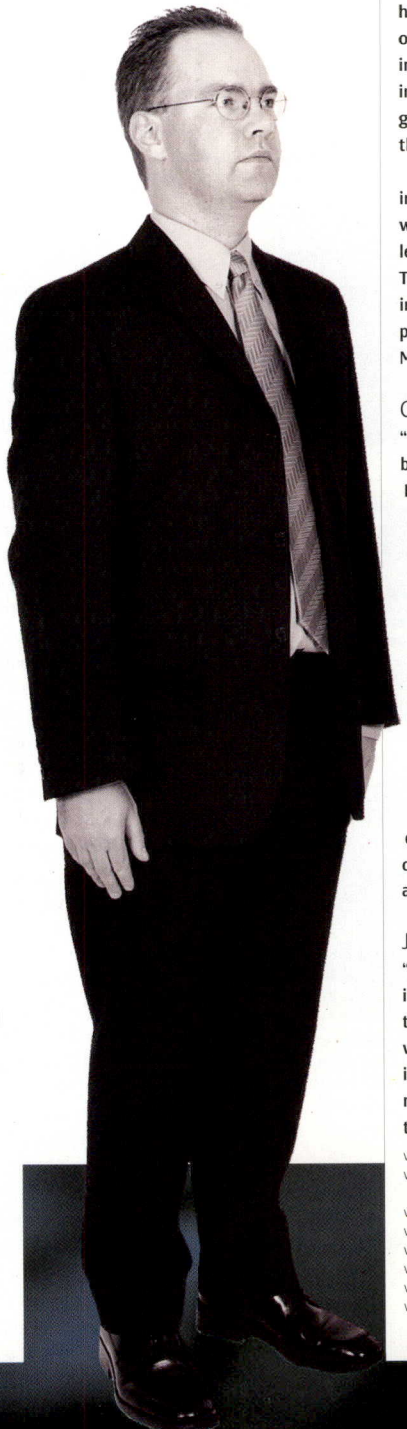
DUNCAN WILSON, AKQA: "But before we can put a product in front of a consumer, or in front of a client, we really need to know what we can put in front of them. It's hard for us to go into clients and then enthuse to them about this when you can't even tell them what they'll be doing in 6, 12 months or 18 months. Some sort of production schedule would be useful. It would be nice to know when these colour pics are coming. Will it be in a year, sooner or way beyond that?"

STEVE WALKER: "A great deal of that is determined by the standardisation that goes on behind the technology. But I can tell you today that GPRS services will be there next year, and multimedia messaging too.

"Generally, if something's going to be available in the next six months, you'll be told about it. That's for sure." ■

TEXT: **GRAEME AYMER**

PHOTOGRAPHY: **NICK WILSON**



FEEDBACK – WHAT THEY THOUGHT

DUNCAN 'DOUGIE' WILSON, ONEBADMONKEY

"It was good to hear the 'real world' production schedule – to get a glimpse of how GPRS and UMTS are being phased in over time – they're not going to fall on us in big clots of bandwidth! That's really important, getting a sense of how we're going to have to scale the services over the next few years.

"Control method is a big question – the interface is bound to be changing, and I'm wondering what the manufacturers have learnt from the first roll-out of handsets. There didn't really seem to be any innovations that got past the conventional pen /screen interface of the navi-roller. Maybe some day soon..."

GILES SMITH, TGM

"The session confirmed that WAP can only become more interesting as it gets older. However: reality tells us that it is the consumer who judges these things. Think back to VHS, Betamax and Video2000. Video2000 offered the best quality, yet the market chose VHS. Call me old fashioned, but as WAP is still embryonic, I think we should allow it to develop naturally rather than force it into something it might not become. WAP isn't just for phones.

"As yet, we haven't done anything beyond current implementations of WAP. We are conducting research, but that's our own business. Suffice it to say, we will only move when we feel there is a genuine advantage to be gained for our clients."

JASON BINNS, DESIGN.NET

"The explosive growth of the Internet is largely due to the fact that the technology to create and hose a website was virtually free – anyone could get involved. This gave birth to the diversity now present. For 3G to be successful, the same will have to be true."

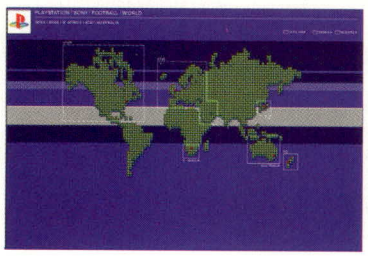
w: **www.ericsson.se/developerszone/**
w: **www.symbian.com**

w: **www.zinc.co.uk**
w: **www.akqa.com**
w: **www.onebadmoney.com**
w: **www.tgm.co.uk**
w: **www.gluemedia.com**
w: **www.design.net**

man of the people

TECHNOLOGY HAS ITS PLACE, BUT ICON MEDIALAB'S MAGNUS LIF BELIEVES THAT USERS ARE THE REAL ISSUE CREATIVES SHOULD BE CONCERNED WITH

Name:	Dr Magnus Lif
Age:	34
Job title:	Usability engineer
Company:	Icon Medialab
Example of work:	www.playstation-europe.com www.fsharpbank.com www.celexa.co.uk
Before:	PhD in Human Computer Interaction, Uppsala, Sweden
Goals for 2005:	"To make the focus more on communication rather than technology"
Contact:	020 7549 0207/www.iconmedialab.com



Icon Medialab has put the user first with its design of playstation-europe.com. The site is now available in 11 languages and can handle heavy traffic in anticipation of the launch of PlayStation2, due mid-November.

Designing a good site in one language is hard enough. Designing a good site in 11 languages covering 16 European countries is a different task altogether. But when the company you're designing it for is Sony Computer Entertainment Europe (SCEE) and when the project is the new PlayStation Europe site, then you can't really say no. Dr Magnus Lif, usability engineer at London's Icon Medialab, certainly didn't.

"We really wanted to build on the PlayStation community," says Magnus. "For many people, being a PlayStation user becomes part of your identity and we wanted to enhance this experience." Twelve months ago, he got his chance. SCEE looked to Icon Medialab when multilingual needs and the impending launch of the PlayStation2 called for a complete restructuring of playstation-europe.com The company's reach into the continental marketplace also demanded a centralised architecture and developers toolbox to enable local European sites to use the same functionality, but with a regional interpretation of the brand.

"It doesn't matter if you create a really well-designed site or a highly advanced technical one, it has to work," says Magnus. "It's therefore very important to get under the skin of the people who are going to use it." Starting from the outside in, Magnus set about investigating what users wanted from the site in order for Icon Medialab to design a system that corresponded to those needs. "We carried out questionnaires and interviews to find out how people would use the site and what they wanted out of it," he says. "SCEE is a very user-centred company and they do a lot of research themselves that we were able to use and learn from." Icon Medialab also reviewed a lot of competitor sites to understand the state of same-market services and how users rated what was already on offer.

With the necessary information in place, the next step was to build a prototype solution. "Prototypes are important when communicating with designers, users and clients, as they visually demonstrate how a site will work," says Magnus. "But my experience is that for technical people, a prototype doesn't have enough depth." To solve this problem, Icon Medialab adopted 'use cases', a particular way of describing user requirements, to aid communication between its different departments. Combined with the prototype, the 'use cases' enabled designers, techies and usability engineers to operate on the same wavelength as they worked towards a unified end.

Before the PlayStation site was launched, users were brought in to highlight potential problems. "We observed the users performing a predetermined set of tasks," explains Magnus. "Interviewing them isn't enough because what they say they do is not always what they actually do. They might say that they understand everything about a site, but at the same time you can see they are having big problems."

Bringing in users enabled Magnus and his colleagues to address particular problem areas. "We had designed a very advanced search function with a lot of different parameters," he says. "The problem was that a lot of users didn't understand that they could combine the text field together with the drop-downs. We realised that to make it easier, we had to split the search functionality in two."

The tests may have been carried out in Icon Medialab's London office but, as the name suggests, playstation-europe.com covers the whole of Europe. At the moment the site is administrated centrally, but a content management system is being implemented so that territories can modify content locally, while still maintaining structure and brand consistency. Adapting a site within its branding boundaries is crucial for the target audience and requires more than just a multi-lingual capability. "You learn a lot of things from your cultural environment," explains Magnus. "Icons and metaphors can be perceived very differently between cultures. In fact, some people think that northern Europeans are more interested in very functional and clean sites, whereas Italians like sites to be highly graphical in their design."

Design tastes aside, Magnus and his associates will be watching eagerly when the PS2 launches in mid-November. With 28 million PlayStations already in Europe, the Dynamo-based application server is being load tested with an unprecedented number of hits in mind. Providing appropriate hardware for heavy traffic is just one way in which the PlayStation site proves that technology plays a fundamental part in Web design. Hardware alone, however, is not a big feature on Magnus' list. "Working in Human Computer Interaction (he has a PhD in the subject), you realise that technology is no good if people can't use it," says Magnus. "Technology must enhance peoples' lives rather than complicating them." ■

TEXT: **KEITH DREW**/ PHOTOGRAPHY: **NICK WILSON**

the glitter of litter

THERE ARE TONS OF PLACES TO FIND INSPIRATION FOR WEB DESIGN. YOU COULD LOOK IN A MAGAZINE OR ON THE INTERNET ITSELF; OR YOU COULD TAKE THE APPROACH FAVOURED BY AMAZE DESIGNER CLARE CURRAN...

Clare Curran gets inspiration from unusual sources: "It may sound a bit weird, but I find myself looking at bus tickets or train tickets. Or you find nice little bits of Japanese wrapping or packaging. It might just have a nice bit of typography that you could see used in some way or other."

She's not alone in this. One of her online inspirations is the New York design agency 52mm's website. "It has this part of its site where it's just images from photographs it's taken, or objects it's found in the street." Other inspiration comes from work by influential agencies like Razorfish and Attik. And then there's designer David Carson: "He was my god when I was in college!"

This, and constantly taking notes and photographs of everyday objects, have inspired Clare as she designs websites for some of Amaze's most important clients. For example, there is her work for Saatchi and Saatchi, on the advertising agency's Innovations in Communications website (www.saatchi.com). She's also done work for Saatchi and Saatchi's heresanidea.com Or her design for drug company Warner-Lambert for a medical site, www.allergyadvice.co.uk. Each project had its own design requirements.

The Saatchi Innovations award site was based on Leonardo da Vinci's ideas sketches. So after the usual group brainstorming session, Clare set to work. There was subtle use of *Flash*, and even some work in *After Effects*, which Clare learned double-quick.

"The main focus of the Saatchi innovations site was to try and do something different in *Flash*," she explains. "Sometimes animation can be overbearing. We wanted to keep it subtle."

Whereas the Warner-Lambert site was an entirely different affair. "It wanted the branding to show trust and create more of a health device rather than just putting Benadryl on a website," Clare recollects.

This is indeed the case. Rather than focus on selling allergy relief medicine, Amaze's site uses Warner-Lambert's brand image to create a pollen forecast and medical advice service online.

But it was heresanidea.com that gave Clare a licence to thrill. Her idea was a simple, futuristic site that defied the conventions of getting along online. "We had total creative freedom to do whatever we wanted," Clare remembers. "I was working with two developers. We kind of wanted to make it an idea in itself, so we messed about with the navigation."

Amaze's passion for navigation is not only evident in Clare's work. The company has invented its own navigation device – the Navihedron. This is a *Shockwave* application that suspends links around a central axis, which you can rotate, like a 3D online Roladex, to link to wherever you want on a website.

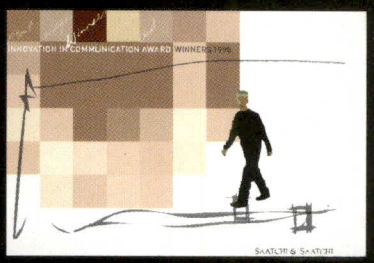
The best example of the Navihedron's use online can be found on a site Amaze designed for the local government of Western Australia called Transportal (www.transportal.wa.gov.au). Transportal provides residents of Western Australia with information like bus timetables, driver's license applications, local government regulations on road freight, and so on.

This isn't Clare's work, but she understands why it is necessary to use innovative ways to present information online. "It's just a way of sorting information and putting information across," she summarises. "It's giving the user something interesting to play with rather than just sifting through loads of text. It's making something look a bit more interesting."

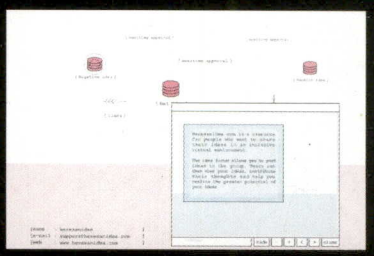
As for Clare's future style, expect to see more subtlety, motion graphics and navigational experimentation. But don't expect her to forget the basics: "I think you still have to stick to the fundamentals of typography, the same as you do in print, but consider the medium. It's all initial layout, things like that." ■

TEXT: **GRAEME AYMER** / PHOTOGRAPHY: **NICK WILSON**

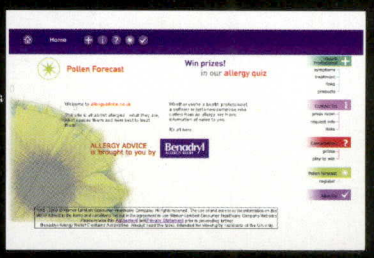
Name:	
Age:	22
Job title:	Designer
Company:	Amaze
Example of work:	www.saatchi.com www.heresanidea.com www.allergyadvice.co.uk www.amaze.com/lab/favourites
Fave project:	www.heresanidea.com
Before:	Studying for MA in creative technology
Goals for 2005:	"Just to be doing this. Having my creative freedom"
Contact:	www.amaze.com/0151 330 3300



Clare used video footage treated in *Flash* to create a site with a difference for saatchi.com



heresanidea.com provided Clare with the creative freedom to subvert some of the conventions of online navigation.



Clare's design for pharmaceutical company Warner-Lambert's allergyrelief.co.uk site used product packaging as part of an online branding campaign.

physical fashion

FASHION WEEK IN LONDON PROVED THE PERFECT STAGE FOR DIGIT'S ORLANDO MATHIAS TO STEP OUTSIDE THE WEB AND DRAG INTERACTION INTO A PHYSICAL DOMAIN

Research and development. A bit of a buzz phrase, but more often than not the area where an agency can really push its boundaries. As head of interaction at Digit, Orlando Mathias is responsible for large sections of the agency's R&D experiments, housed under the link on its website. Although it's about to be updated, the original site still receives plenty of praise. "It gave us a chance to experiment with *Director* and other software," says Orlando. "If someone has a good idea, then we try and give them the opportunity to explore it to the full." Digit normally intersperses corporate projects with less-constrained work – so after labouring away on a lengthy ecommerce site, Orlando was due for his own bit of experimentation. "At the moment I am pushing the idea of taking it out of the computer and putting it into an actual environment," he says. "Using the Internet but bringing it into the physical world."

Orlando's latest project is certainly giving him that chance. Taking advantage of London Fashion Week, Digit plans to swap window displays with Jones, the Covent Garden-based fashion boutique. From Wednesday 20 September onwards, Jones will house its new collection in Digit's Hoxton studio while the agency is set to take over its West End shop. Orlando hopes to have enough finance to place 20 computers, 20 flat screens and a few plasmas around the shop.

"We originally worked along the lines of what we've done on the Web, but an installation requires something much bolder and much stronger, something which you could connect with straight away," he says. To that end, Orlando came up with the idea of taking a model, dividing them up and putting each section in a different screen. "We've done a fashion shoot of this guy with a huge orange afro and we're going to have his image spread across all the screens," he explains. "We've developed a way of tracking colour and movement through a video camera which the computer can react to. If you walk past his foot or his hand, it will turn over and the rest of the body will follow. At certain points the model will get up and curl himself up into one of the screens, or maybe end up walking through them all."

Other than the visual impact, Orlando envisages shoppers roaming oblivious of the affects their movements will have. "It's about passive interaction," he says. "Because you don't have to press a button, you may not even know you're interacting with it. If someone is wearing a very bright colour for instance, you can tell the computer to follow that colour and the screens will track that person throughout the shop without them even knowing."

Orlando studied HTML after doing a Fine Arts degree but it wasn't until he learnt *Director* and started programming that he became fully aware of the possibilities. "I realised that programming could be as powerful as any other form of art," he says. The Jones project required him to combine these skills, but is it possible to repeat such a project on the Web? Orlando is hopeful of eventually using this approach in Digit's Internet work.

"We're still using stuff with our clients that we created in the digital experiences section," he says. "It all trickles down at some point. If we can use something that's been developed by a designer's personal work we will, but most of the time it depends on the client. It has to be functional and practical, so most experimental stuff gets whittled down."

Digit's work with Jones could be just the start, though. It already has a similar project planned with a New York-based Web design agency for the ICA in October and Orlando is keen on developing that side of his portfolio. "The keyboard and the mouse are very limited," he says. "I want to use the Internet outside the Web. I'd like to integrate it into the architectural surroundings of a building itself, making a person's physical presence affect that structure. At the moment the big clients don't have the trust in us that they do in architectural bodies, so it's hard to convince a client who is spending millions of pounds on its building to do something like this." But it's surely just a matter of time. ■

TEXT: **KEITH DREW**/ PHOTOGRAPHY: **NICK WILSON**

Name:	**Orlando Mathias**
Age:	**27**
Job title:	**Head of interaction**
Company:	**Digit**
Example of work:	**www.digital-experiences.com www.landdesignstudio.co.uk www.archweek.co.uk**
Before:	**Freelancing**
Goals for 2005:	**"Moving more into architecturally based work where we can implant interaction into a physical building"**
Contact:	**020 7681 0110/ www.digit1.com**

Visitors to Jones during London Fashion Week will interact with a display like the one above, causing parts of the image to shift or follow them about the shop.

autobahn dancing

WHEN KRAFTWERK WERE LOOKING FOR A DESIGN TEAM TO TRANSLATE ITS MINIMALIST ETHOS INTO A WEBSITE, THE GROUP TURNED TO FRIENDCHIP

Expensive graphics packages? Who needs them? I'm sitting in Friendchip designer Anthony Burrill's study, watching him demonstrate the hidden depths of *MS Paint*. He uses it on all of his Web projects, admittedly bringing in *Flash* when a bit of animation is required. And it's not as if he's an amateur designer bumbling away on his personal homepage. Anthony's *MS Paint* skills have been requisitioned by the likes of Kraftwerk, MTV and techno-artist Scanner, among others.

This ain't no cheap trick operation, in other words. This is Friendchip – the partnership of brothers-in-law Anthony Burrill and Kip Parker. Working from their homes in Brixton and Clapham, the duo have produced a series of sites stamped with their own unique brand of design values. "It's a stripped-back minimal kind of aesthetic," says Anthony. "It's very basic, but there's a lot of humour in there."

Basic is certainly the word – and not in a bad way. While many designers are looking to make their sites more complex and graphically richer, Anthony and Kip are pursuing their own unique design ethos. You want reference points? Think *Space Invader*-era computer games. Not only because Friendchip uses a deliberately pixel-based graphical style, but also because it's made heavy use of Atari-style sound samples in its work. It was possibly this preponderance of old-skool bleeps and bloops that got it the chance to work on the official website for German electronica legends Kraftwerk.

After a representative of the band got in touch, Friendchip won the job after a three-way pitching process. For Anthony, it was a dream come true, having got into Kraftwerk aged 13, and spending a considerable amount of his teenage years "wanting to be a robot" as a result. As you'd expect, working with the reclusive maestros had its interesting aspects. "It was a strange job," remembers Kip. "They wouldn't contact us directly, so it was all done via this third person. Because they work through the night, we'd get these messages popping up at 3am with 'Directives from Kling Klang' on them!"

Although the pair weren't allowed to talk about the work in public, word of mouth and personal contacts have brought more intriguing projects their way. This includes the personal site for MTV Europe supremo Brent Hansen, which went live in August as part of the MTV intranet. The familiar Friendchip style and sounds are all there, including the obligatory illustrations straight outta, yes, *MS Paint*.

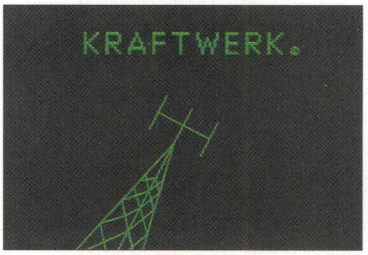
There's also been some work that, while done for external clients, had less of a commercial focus. One such was do-TV, a one-day Web-based conference on the future of television. "It was quite a cultural project," says Anthony. "They weren't trying to sell anything specifically. That's the kind of commercial work we like best."

As for the future? The rollout of broadband is unlikely to alter Friendchip's minimalist ethos – after all, why should it? "The reason our work looks like it does is nothing to do with bandwidth," claims Kip. "It's because boxes and flat colours look beautiful on a monitor screen. When you do all the anti-aliasing and smooth the edges, you lose a lot of that quality. We love sharp edges and geometric shapes."

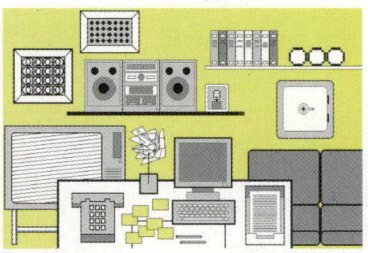
The duo's projects so far have all been with clients who fitted in with these design values. But looking to the future, what would they do if they got offered pots of cash to create something really commercial – say, a redesign of the official Britney Spears website? Anthony and Kip fall about laughing at the thought. "Of course we'd do it," says Kip. "But," says Anthony, "I'm not sure they'd like the results!" ■

TEXT: **STUART DREDGE** / PHOTOGRAPHY: **NICK WILSON**

Name:	Anthony Burrill & Kip Parker
Age:	33 (Anthony) and 28 (Kip)
Job title:	Co-founders
Company:	Friendchip
Example of work:	www.dfuse.com/scanner/ www.kraftwerk.de Purer version of the Kraftwerk site, and other non-commercial projects, can be found at www.friendchip.com
Fave project:	www.kraftwerk.de
Before:	Graphic design (Anthony) and "various non-Web jobs" (Kip) – including managing a band.
Goals for 2000:	"To continue working with interesting clients on 'futuristic' projects"
Contact:	www.friendchip.com



Surprisingly (or perhaps not), Friendchip had no direct contact with Kraftwerk while working on its official site.



Anthony used his finely-honed *MS Paint* skills to create the basics of this intranet site for MTV Europe's Brent Hansen.

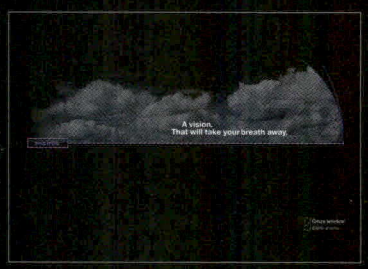
dream machine

HECTIC FROM DAY ONE OR AS SMOOTH AS CLOCKWORK? AKQA'S AJAZ AHMED AND NICK TURNER TAKE US FOR A CREATIVE SPIN THROUGH THE NEW BMW Z8 SITE

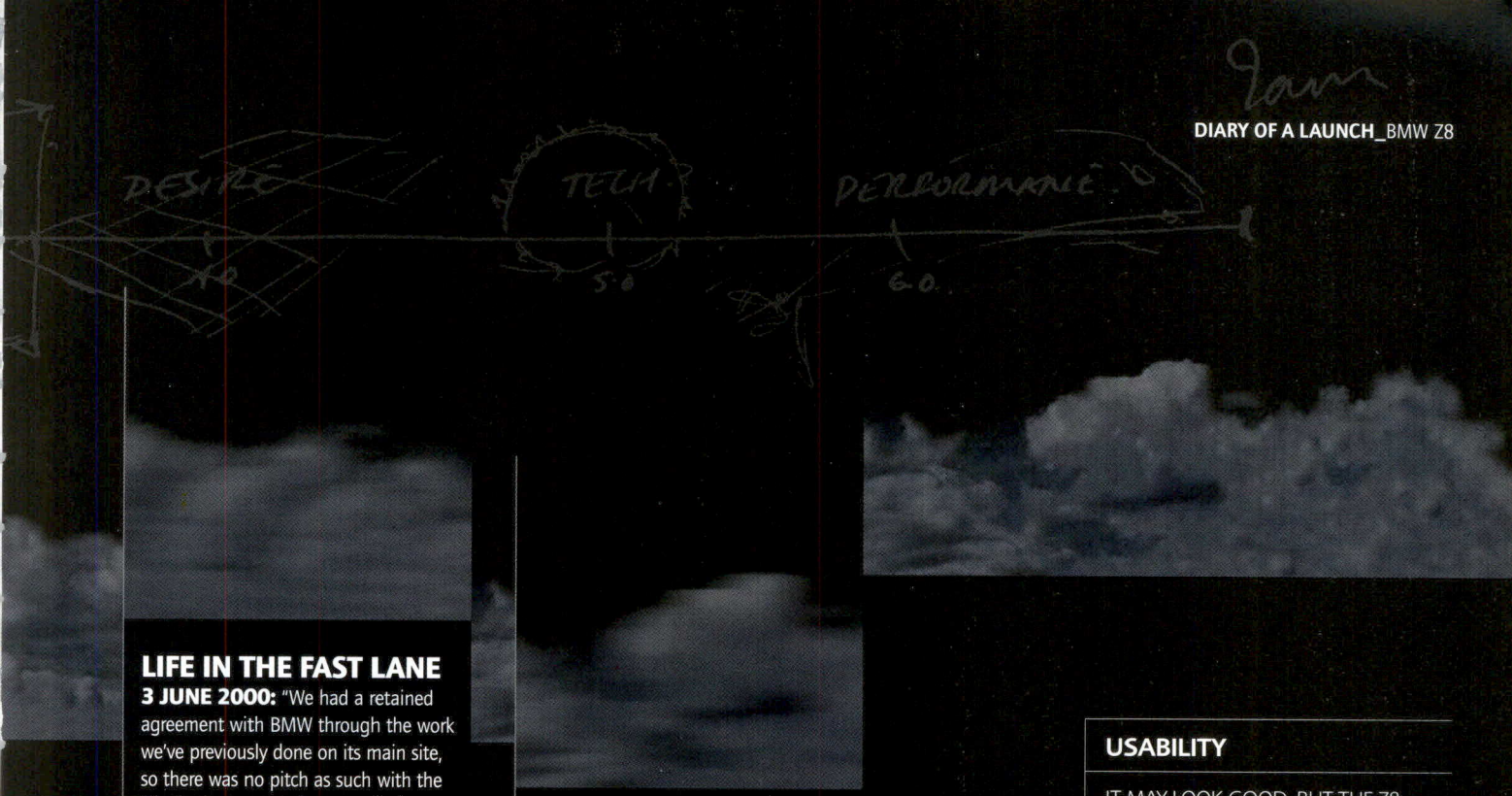
Name:	BMW Z8 site
Address:	www.bmw.co.uk/z8
Agency:	AKQA
Size of overall team:	4 designers and a copywriter
Production length:	7 weeks
Number of man-hours:	Countless
Overall cost:	Not mentioned

Designing a site that reflects the ultimate driving experience is asking a lot of any creative team. But for AKQA, the UK's largest independent Internet services company, it wasn't exactly a new challenge. AKQA has been working with BMW for five years, since the launch of bmw.co.uk in January 1995, and has an ongoing relationship with the German car manufacturer on both content and services development.

Since 1994, AKQA has built itself up by specialising in product-focused work for established brands such as Microsoft, Land Rover and Sainsbury's. Working with a company over a long period of time aids its understanding of the brand. AKQA's latest project, the BMW Z8 site, was a classic case of this ongoing relationship. Every member of the team employed on the Z8 site, for example, had a working history with BMW. We asked AKQA's Ajaz Ahmed and Nick Turner to slip behind the wheel, put the pedal to the metal and take us through the process.



The site opens with keywords from the Z8's brochure, 'Dream. Vision. Reality' – the dream of owning such a car through to the reality of the actual product.



LIFE IN THE FAST LANE

3 JUNE 2000: "We had a retained agreement with BMW through the work we've previously done on its main site, so there was no pitch as such with the Z8 site. Our approach was really how to make this as brilliant as it could be rather than trying to win the business."

7 JUNE: "When you've worked with the same brand for five years, you get to know what they want pretty well. BMW expects us to come up with a recommendation that's going to be the right one, so we generally go back with one solution we feel is the best, rather than giving them a number of options.

"BMW was happy with our original ideas but wanted a few things tweaked that weren't quite right. We were developing a dream sequence to introduce the site and originally we picked concepts we thought matched this. We were going to have a white dove or a ballerina to portray graceful movement, but when we showed these to BMW the brand values didn't quite fit these images. The main focus should be the car and it is the car."

BMW Z8 SITE PRODUCTION

11 JUNE: "We based the structure of the site on keywords from the Z8 brochure, 'Dream, Vision and Reality'. As it wasn't a new brand for us, the time spent on conceptions and creative direction was quick. We knew the product was king so we could work from there. A week after our first meeting the flat screen concepts were finalised. The whole site would be centrally focused as opposed to websites designed left to right, top to bottom, because the user hones in on the centre. We just put the Z8 in the middle of the screen and built everything around it. We didn't want navigation or content to interfere with the beauty of the car. The first thing a user should see is the Z8."

12 JUNE: "We designed the feature itself full screen. The concept behind this is a dream scene, taking you away from the Web environment into the Z8 dream. All the browser features are gone and the focus is totally on the car.

"We'd noticed that the Internet can agitate people – we wanted this to be an experience rather than a website. That's partly where the dream sequence comes in. We designed the intro so it features glimpses and ideas of the car, like in a dream. Animations and sound follow a slowed-down heartbeat tempo, so when you work your way through the site it's a relaxed atmosphere."

14 JUNE: "We decided to build the site in *Flash*. All the BMW sites are totally integrated into the software and we thought this technology was relevant in helping people enter an experience rather than just a website. It's not like we use *Flash* all the time so one of the challenges was to learn more about what we could really do with it."

16 JUNE: "We design for the lowest modem, so we included intelligent loading sequences in all the menus, mini-introductions and animations. The organic sub-menu pre-loads the sections ➤

USABILITY

IT MAY LOOK GOOD, BUT THE Z8 SITE'S ALSO GOT TO WALK THE WALK

With a design team of 20, AKQA looks internally to test its work. "We do a lot of our usability testing in-house," says Nick. "We're constantly discussing what's working and what isn't as the site progresses, to ensure that it is."

Although usability covers all aspects of a site's structure, one of the most important features to monitor is if people are finding the site easy to navigate around.

"We always require a good navigation system, but with the Z8 project it had to be particularly easy," says Nick. "I always compare it to visiting a strange city. Say you didn't know where you were and that each night you stayed in a different hotel around the city. Whenever you'd ventured out you'd probably come across places you'd visited before but you would never know if you'd explored the whole city. However, if you stay in a central hotel, then you'd always have a reference point to start from and to return to. That's how I looked at the navigation working on the Z8 site and that's how I think the Explore feature works."

Statistics are also useful, but can only affect the production of the next site. "Finding out where people go on a site is very important," says Nick. "Those areas that are more popular with users influence the way we design our future projects. "It won't be so easy differentiating on the Z8 site, though. Virtually all the areas are proving popular. In the first ten days of going completely live, the site had 4,120 unique visitors.

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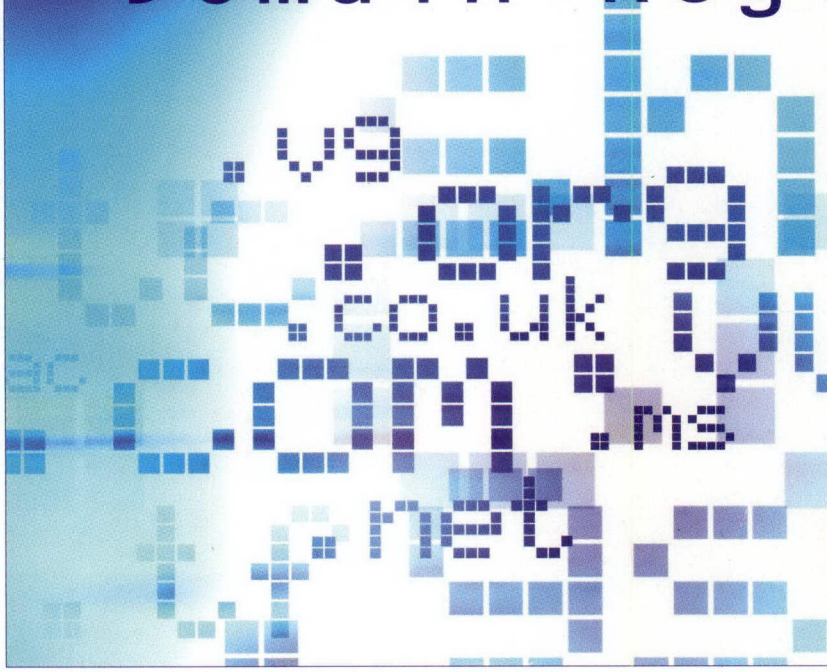

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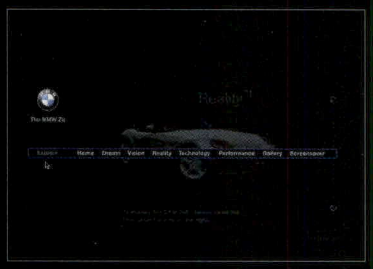
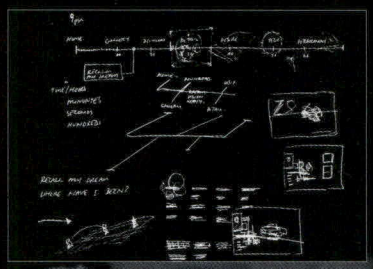




"We wanted the navigation to blend into the scene and to be structured like a 5-speed gearbox," says Nick. "That way people could move deep into the site rather than read in, read out."

in the background. If you've got a fast connection that's great, but if it's slow, the site will load in phases."

17 JUNE: "We wanted the navigation to blend in and be structured like a 5-speed gearbox, so that people could move deep into the site or out of it depending on where they wanted to go, rather than read in, read out.

"The navigation is suspended under 'Explore', so no matter where you are in the site, rolling over it will activate the menu. If you linger on the text, it will start animating what's underneath, which is handy for people who haven't been to the site before. For those who have, a quick rollover will stop the text appearing. The left-hand side of the navigation is the start of the 'Dream', the home page, and at the far right is the end of the 'Dream', a gallery and screensaver of the 'Reality', the Z8."

19 JUNE: "Most sites have a click, wait, read, mentality. We wanted users to feel they were actually being taken through the site. All the animations after the opening introduction sequence, including the revealing of the navigation, are smooth and sweeping. We wanted all transitions to be fluid and organic, without typical Internet jerkiness, so everything is done through rollovers. Even the directional circle on the 'Reality' page has been set with elastic attributes so that it just follows your mouse and helps create an organic, smooth environment."

23 JUNE: "We often reject companies that aren't product-focused. If something isn't properly targeted, then third elements of communication, essentially puffery, enter the fray. When you've got such a good product you don't need the padding. We didn't want anything that wasn't going to push the branding so we'd rather talk about the doorhandles or the rigid body shell than have a picture of a smiling bloke or something that just ruins the whole environment.

"Consumers are infinitely smarter than designers anyway. We talk about it being puffery but for them that's stating the obvious. You ask a consumer what they want from a car site and they'll say they just want to see the product and interact with it."

27 JUNE: "Our usability tests revealed that people wanted more virtual tours or walkarounds of the actual car. We couldn't get hold of the Z8 to photograph, so we had to create a car up in 3D from a 1/18 model. A reflection was added to give the car a surface; we didn't want any of the images to look as if they were floating.

"Most virtual tours require another plug-in such as *QuickTime*. Another reason for using *Flash* was that we had statistics from Macromedia that most people nowadays already have *Flash* on their browsers, so it was a way we could use the feature without asking the user to download anything else."

10 JULY: "We get together regularly as creative teams and discuss each others' projects. The Z8 site was put in front of our Microsoft, Sainsbury's, and Orange teams for usability tests. The Microsoft team especially has a strong usability testing element to it."

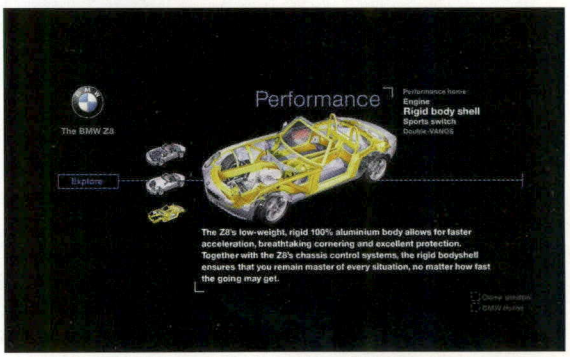
CAR COMMERCE

WITH A TRAFFIC JAM OF CAR SITES ON THE INFORMATION HIGHWAY, THE Z8 FEATURE NEEDED AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO STAND OUT

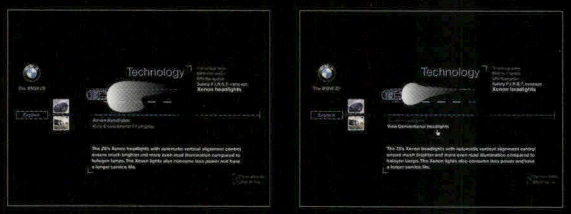
Apart from designing the main BMW site, AKQA has also worked for Rover and Mini. So how did the Z8 project differ?

"We knew that the Z8 would have a halo effect on the whole brand so people would probably buy into BMW via this car," says Ajaz. "We were aware that people might come to the site because of the Z8 and end up buying a 3-series. The difference is essentially what the Z8 represents. It's such a beautiful product that the challenge is to build something that will make people even more attracted to it.

"The way of doing that was by making the site have a certain amount of depth and paying a lot of attention to detail. A lot of people will aspire to this car, but because of the price and the limited availability they won't be able to get one. This site provides them with the closest access they're likely to achieve."


The BMW Z8
Performance
Engine
Rigid body shell
Sports switch
Explore
The Z8's low-weight, rigid 100% aluminium body allows for faster acceleration, breathtaking cornering and excellent protection. Together with the Z8's chassis control systems, the rigid bodyshell ensures that you remain master of every situation, no matter how fast the going may get.

Pushing the branding of the Z8 was a key aspect of AKQA's work. "We'd rather talk about the doorhandles or the rigid body shell than have a picture of a smiling bloke or something that just ruins the whole environment," says Ajaz.



The Z8 site prospers from a deep attention to detail. Animated shots enable the user to see just how much brighter Xenon lights really are.

BMW Z8 SITE LAUNCH

17 JULY: "Trying to create the perfect product meant for more than a few late nights. We worked on several all-nighters, meticulously checking every little detail and every link. If the transitions are slightly out and the way the text blends in between sections is different, then people would see these imperfections straight away."

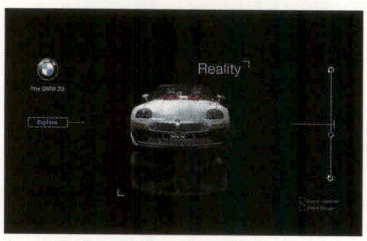
24 JULY: "The average time spent on a website is five minutes. Since the day the site launched, the time that people are spending on it is just under nine minutes. The stickiness of the site is a lot higher because of its depth. Our aim is to get someone to stay on the site for 15 minutes.

SO WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR AKQA AND BMW?

"Like all websites, the Z8 project is never finished," says Ajaz. "We're getting a lot of repeat visits so we'd like to add different content upgrades like virtual tours around the interior and possibly a change of colours.

"The thing about BMW is that they always want the very best. They know that we're fired up to push the boundaries too. It wouldn't work if those values contradicted each other, but with everyone focused on the same objective of creating great work, interesting the consumer and building the brand, it really works." ■

TEXT: **KEITH DREW**

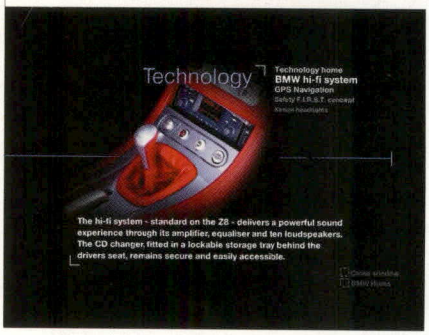


Usability tests carried out by AKQA found the majority of users wanted a 360° virtual tour of the Z8. The agency duly obliged, adding the car's reflection to stop the appearance of floating.

NO CAR? NO PROBLEM

LIMITED Z8 NUMBERS LEFT AKQA WORKING FROM MODELS, PHOTOGRAPHS AND BROCHURES. BUT, AS CHAIRMAIN AJAZ AHMED EXPLAINS, THAT ONLY AIDS THE USER'S EXPERIENCE IN THE END.

"The biggest challenge was knowing that we weren't going to have the actual car. We designed the site from pictures and brochures, we didn't actually get to see the Z8 until later on in the project. However, this is the same for the user. The one thing that they're not getting when they visit the Z8 site is the experience of actually driving the car. Not seeing the Z8 meant that every inch and detail of the car that we had drawn on was passed onto people accessing the site. Once the design was approved, we then went to see the car to see if the user would get the whole experience without physically visiting one. We knew every element of the car when we went to see it live, so we felt justified in what we'd designed."


Technology
Technology home
BMW hi-fi system
GPS Navigation
The hi-fi system - standard on the Z8 - delivers a powerful sound experience through its amplifier, equaliser and ten loudspeakers. The CD changer, fitted in a lockable storage tray behind the drivers seat, remains secure and easily accessible.

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THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

AN AWARENESS OF BRANDING IS INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT FOR NEW MEDIA DESIGNERS. WITH THIS IN MIND, HERE ARE THE TEN RULES YOU SHOULD NOT BREAK. THOU SHALT NOT FORGET THEM...

As a designer, you need to know about branding. In fact, you need to know about branding almost as much as the clients you work for – whether it's a dotcom start-up or an offline brand needing an online presence.

This is particularly true now, when larger organisations are increasingly looking to interactive agencies, rather than branding consultancies, to help them with their online branding. Oyster recently got the go-ahead to work on Orange's brand across all mediums. Organic is in the process of setting up its own internal branding department. And everywhere else in London seems to be taking on dedicated brand staff whose focus is branding.

We talked to a selection of creative directors and brand strategists at some of the UK's largest agencies – focusing on those that have the resources to undertake branding work, as well as pure design. But that doesn't mean this feature is only relevant to a few London-based companies.

We went looking for some general branding principles, and also opinions, that are relevant to designers working all over the UK. If your client is a small or medium-sized business, it's unlikely to have a brand strategy as clearly defined as the likes of Coca-Cola, BMW and Amazon. But most of the issues raised here will apply just as strongly. A company's brand represents its core values: why it exists, how it operates, and what experience it provides.

And the rewards of incorporating more branding strategy into your work? Not only will you be providing a better online experience, but you'll be helping to push Web design forward. "We're at a total Zeitgeist," says Digit's Rob Cooke. "We're at the very forefront of change, because we can make a difference to brands, and to consumers' lives. It's a great time to be alive." Read on...

1 IT'S MUCH MORE THAN A LOGO

It's easy to assume that a company's brand is just its logo, corporate colours, and the choice of font it uses in its communications. Easy, but wrong. Even offline, where people often confuse a company's brand with its corporate identity, it's not that simple. It's tempting to think, for example, that Nike's brand is the 'swoosh' logo (the tick). But it's not – that swoosh is just a symbol of the deeper brand values that Nike wants to portray.

But that's fairly obvious – most professional Web designers know this. But the problem comes when clients don't. If you're working for a client whose roots are in the offline world, it can get caught up in the idea that transporting its brand visuals across is all it needs for an effective website. If only it was that easy.

"It's not just a cut and paste exercise," says AKQA's creative director Daniel Bonner. "You don't just take the corporate identity and make sure that you get the right colours. It's a very different space we're working in."

It's an interactive space, in other words. Far less important than slapping a client's company logo all over the site is ensuring that users are provided with a truly interactive experience. "Interaction is the critical difference between online and offline brands," says Viant lead creative Ian Worley.

The mark of a strong online brand is the experience provided by its site, not the quality of its visuals. Interviewees for this feature consistently cited Amazon as one of the strongest online brands, because of its user experience. After all, can you remember its logo? And does that affect your perception of the brand? Exactly.

This notion of interaction can stump some of the larger offline brands, who are used to hammering home their brand message through TV and print. "It's less about just projecting one thing," says Razorfish creative director Olof Schybergson. "It's more about engaging people in a dialogue. You can't hide behind a glossy facade any more."

Most good designers know this: they just have to make sure the client understands, and that means communicating the message to them. "It's about behaviour and how that brand works," says Organic creative director Darryl Feldman. "A lot of clients we deal with come in and talk about how their brand should look and read, not how it acts and behaves."

Features like Amazon's recommendation service are more important to its brand than the logo.

For a high-end product like BMW, the site has to reflect those high quality brand values.

2 UNDERSTAND USER EXPECTATIONS

The trouble with providing an interactive experience is that you run smack up against high user expectations – especially with established offline brands. Users expect a website to reflect the same experience that they're used to getting from a company in the real world. AKQA, for example, works on BMW's online activities. "People have a really high expectation of what their sites should be like, because it's a high-end product," says Bonner. "You can't start devaluing that relationship."

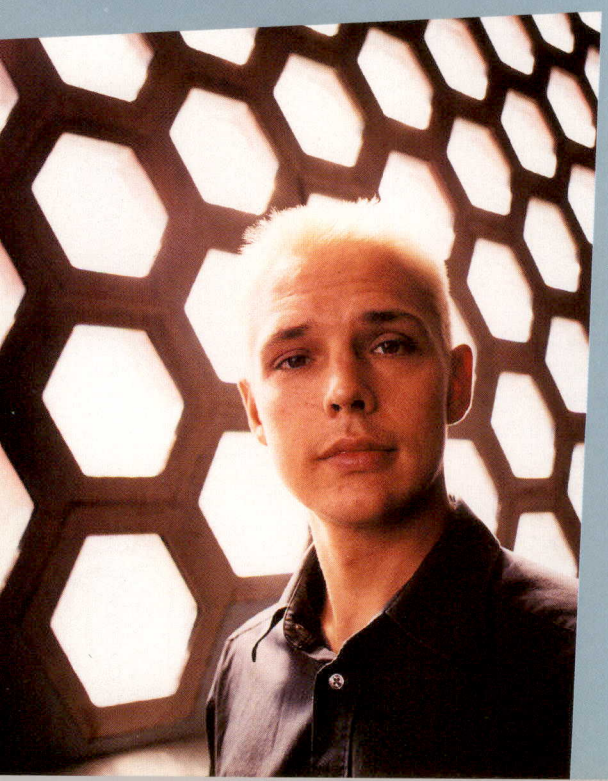
In other words, users aren't prepared to accept a large slide in quality between offline and online. We all know how much the likes of Coca-Cola spends on its TV ads – we expect the same big-budget approach to its website. Except that if this means the site takes hours to download, we're not prepared to wait. Designers are caught between a rock and a hard place.

"Users on the Internet are very unforgiving," says Darryl Feldman. "If they go to a website and it doesn't work, that's it. And it doesn't matter if you're BT, Abbey National or whoever."

The situation is equally tricky if you're working with a newly-created dotcom brand. Although it's not hampered by expectations lingering from an offline parent, it can't count on the years of trust that have often been built up. "One slip, and it colours the remainder of a user's dealings with that brand," says Vanessa Raikes, group head of client services at Traffic Interactive. Business development director Antony Wolfson elaborates.

"If you go to a hotel and the towel in your room is dirty, you don't blame the laundry service specifically – you blame the hotel. And that then colours your perception of the whole experience. You're more likely to notice the slightly scruffy bedspread or the faded wallpaper. It's exactly the same with online brands."

This is why it's so important for designers to be aware of what users expect from a brand. In our feature about getting under the skin of a brand (pages 60-62), numerous creative directors say they send designers out to experience companies from a user's point of view – whether that's calling a helpline, driving a car or staying in a hotel.



LEFT: Razorfish's creative director Olof Schybergson believes that we can no longer hide behind glossy facades when creating online brands: "You have to engage people in a dialogue," he says.

OPPOSITE: Organic's Darryl Feldman dreams up his branding strategies.

3 DON'T EXPECT TO HAVE ENOUGH TIME

"It's like branding on coke," sighs one creative director, musing on the challenge of working with dotcoms on their branding. In a business climate that still seems to focus on being first to the market, rather than creating a quality experience, designers are again caught slap bang in the middle.

"You're expected to turn out an online identity system, corporate look, logo and all the philosophy and background behind that in such a short space of time," says Razorfish brand strategist Sean Winstanley. "That's why there's so many truly horrible start-up brands!"

Organic's Darryl Feldman agrees. "The big traditional branding consultancies take six months to a year to develop a brand. We're doing it in six weeks! And when you're developing a brand at such a fast speed, you make mistakes, and you often haven't got time to test your ideas."

Branding at Internet speed is a phenomenon that may retreat once dotcoms realise that beating their competitors to go live isn't the be-all and end-all of online success. Maybe.

4 TRUST IS EARNED, NOT CREATED

How often have creatives been asked by a fledgling dotcom to produce a "website that people will trust"? Internet users are still wary of ecommerce, so to some extent, any site that's going to require them tapping in credit card details is going to have to look professional. But trustworthy? Sadly, it can't be boiled down to a certain layout or set of colours. Gaining users' trust is more to do with service than look and feel.

"The whole thing about trust is that is has to be earned," says Antony Wolfson. "And the way you earn it is through good experience. Some brands start out by saying 'Our first attribute is trust'. Well, it takes years to build up trust!" And while many offline brands have already accomplished that, dotcoms must rely on people giving them a try, and then ensure that the service – or brand experience – is good enough to inspire confidence. Another talent of Amazon's, in fact.

"Amazon is trusted," says Darryl Feldman. "People know if they give it their credit card details, they'll get something back. Not many other brands have managed to achieve this position."

Once again, for designers, this means focusing on the brand experience – making sure that the website works efficiently – rather than looking for a magical combination of colours and images to win trust. And sadly, often the success or failure of this depends on the client's business practice, rather than the design of the site.

5 MAKE SURE THE BRAND WORKS ACROSS ALL MEDIUMS

There are very few purely online brands that have won their audience through word of mouth these days, Google being an obvious exception. This means that whether you're creating logos or choosing a colour scheme, you need to be aware of how it'll work offline.

Although it's true to say a brand is about much more than just the visual elements, it's still important to get this side right: and as a designer, the responsibility falls to you. When brainstorming ideas for the visual side of a new online brand, arguably the most important thing to consider is how it's going to look offline.

"You've got to think about how it's expressed on every touchpoint, not just the website," says Feldman. "It's easy to think your work looks good on the Web, but as soon as you put it on a van, a sign or a piece of stationery, it might look shit."

When working with established brands, the problem is different. Assuming the offline brand identity has already been created, designers have to produce work that doesn't leave users confused if they've come from the print ad or TV campaign to the website. Traffic Interactive's work for BT Cellnet reflects the distinctive in-store packaging and publicity of the company's mobile phones. This, despite Traffic's initial concerns over how it would translate to the Web.

"The boxes were silver, which doesn't work online," says Vanessa Raikes. "We had to take that, adapt it and go with what would work on TV as well as on the Web and across the board. We didn't want there to be too much of a jump between the different media."

Besides including the interactive elements discussed earlier, you've also got to be able to judge if the company works online, and if not, how you can adapt it so that it does.

6 AVOID THE CLICHÉS

One more point on the visual side of branding. Yes, the overall experience of the site is what makes a brand, not the logo, but there are certain things to avoid when designing them. Like swooshes. And planets. In fact, anything to do with space. It's a cliché of the Internet, assuming that an online brand's logo has to have futuristic connotations. It doesn't.

And as you'll see if you head to www.enormicom.com, several hundred designers have had the same idea before. If a logo is a symbol pointing to the brand's core values, then its look should come from that individual brand's character. Then again, if you're working to the strict time limits we've discussed earlier, it's not surprising that the same old design ideas keep getting wheeled out.

It's also a good idea to avoid tying a company's logo too closely to its product or service. If Amazon's brand identity had been built purely around, say, a book motif, it might have required a redesign when it wanted to move into the sale of CDs and videos.

7 KNOW THE VALUABLE PARTS OF AN OFFLINE BRAND

When you're working with an established offline brand, there's no point re-inventing the wheel unless you absolutely have to. And this goes beyone the previous idea

about ensuring there's at least some style crossover between mediums. One of Traffic's clients has been Yell, the online manifestation of the *Yellow Pages*.

"The *Yellow Pages* has got decades worth of trust built up over generations," points out Vanessa Raikes. "We had to use that positive experience, while at the same time improving the negative, and also add extra services."

Olof Schybergson agrees. "The challenge for us is to take the existing brand and ask what it means in an interactive environment." It's not just porting across the existing brand wholesale.

"You have to associate the medium with the brand," says Digit's Rob Cooke. "It's not just a straight transfer." It's vital for designers to understand what to keep from an offline brand, and what to throw out with the bath water. And then convince the client that you're right.

8 DON'T GET BOGGED DOWN IN GUIDELINES

Many offline companies have spent years developing and refining their brand – particularly those that operate on a global level. Unfortunately, this can often lead to inflexibility on the brand's part when it comes to creating its online identity. As a designer, there's nothing more creatively restrictive than being delivered a 600-page set of brand guidelines, telling you exactly how, when, where and how often to use a certain logo, font, colour or design element.

As you'll see from our later feature on getting under the skin of brands (pages 60-62), these elements are well and good in the real world, but if they don't work online, there's no choice but to adapt them. That's not to say you can ignore a brand's guidelines, but that a certain amount of compromise may be necessary. Which leads us neatly onto…

9 LET YOUR CREATIVE DIRECTOR TAKE THE STRAIN

It's important to have a good grasp of online branding, but at the end of the day, remember, you're a designer. Working with all brands – dotcoms and offline alike – can require delicate negotiations.

"It's the sort of thing we'd look to sort out, rather than burdening designers with it," says Grey Interactive creative director Janette Mooney. "I'd much rather have them free to design, rather than argue with the client!"

Much of the hard work in producing an online brand goes into the planning, with input from the client, brand strategists, creative directors and so on. By the time you begin working on ideas, it should be clear exactly what's expected of you. Most of the people we talked to warned against designers taking too much initiative if things aren't going to plan. "The link between creatives and strategists has to be really strong," says Darryl Feldman. "Quite often there's a disconnect, so the companies want x, y and z, but the designers are off doing something else."

10 UNDERSTAND WHERE ALL THIS IS HEADING

What does the future hold for online branding? This is a big question, with interactive TV, broadband and wireless all likely to have their effects. But there seems to be a consensus among the British design community that more flexibility is going to be the biggest trend in the next few years. It won't just be about how users interact with brands: it'll be about how brands interact with them.

"Brand creators need to think of brands in the various contexts of a customer's life, 365 days of the year," says Ian Worley. "There's a totally different mindset for someone who's surfing at 3pm in the afternoon than if they're doing it at home at 10pm," agrees Rob Cooke. "How your brand reacts to that mindset is important."

In the future, online brands will need to be able to adapt, depending on the mood and preferences of its users. You can see the process starting now with services like My Yahoo!, which enables you to customise the whole experience. "In the future it's going to be much more about people taking a brand and giving their own twist to it," reckons Darryl Feldman. "You're the user, so it's your world," says Daniel Bonner. "You can configure, interact, and give what you want to give."

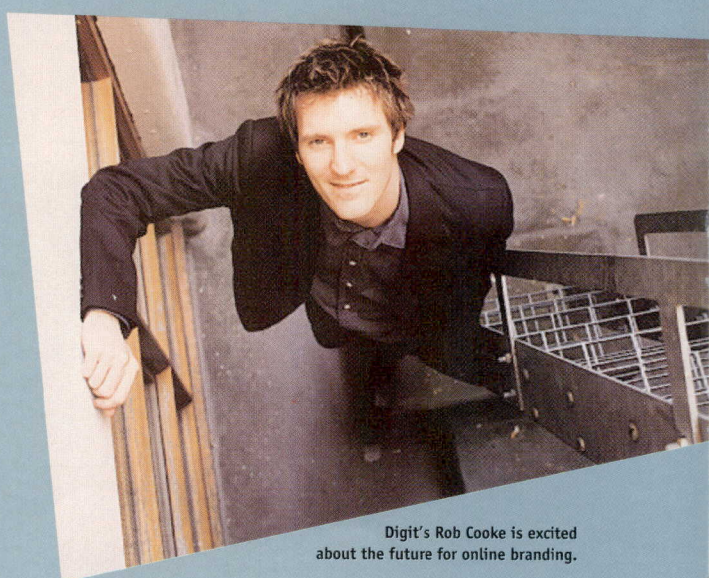
For online brands, this could mean enabling users to tinker with the brand, but it could also involve the use of technologies like predictive modelling to adapt to users' behaviour. And many offline brands are going to have to come to terms with this new way of talking to consumers. "In the future," claims Rob Cooke, "brands are going to have to start talking back to people." ■

TEXT: **STUART DREDGE**

Sites like BT Cellnet's have been designed specifically to fit in with the offline brand identity.

Yahoo! enables you to personlise the look and feel of its brand. In the future, this sort of thing will be automatically done by the site itself.

Thinking of doing a swoosh logo? Take a look at the competition.



Digit's Rob Cooke is excited about the future for online branding.

"WE'RE AT A TOTAL ZEITGEIST. WE'RE AT THE VERY FOREFRONT OF CHANGE, BECAUSE WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO BRANDS"
ROB COOKE, DIGIT

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under the skin

HOW DO YOU GET TO GRIPS WITH WHAT YOUR CLIENT'S BRAND MEANS? WE ASKED AROUND TO FIND OUT HOW CREATIVES ARE GETTING TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER

The start of any project is a challenging time. You've won the pitch, and are itching to get the creative work underway. But as you'll have seen from our main feature, it's crucial to first make sure you truly understand the brand that you're going to be creating an online identity for. The question is how?

Getting under the skin of the brand that you're working on is one of the most important aspects of any project, whether it's for a startup dotcom or for a well-established offline brand. And talking to designers in the course of preparing this issue, we've heard about the range of methods creatives use to get to the heart of what their clients' brands are about. And also, that unless you fully understand the core values of your client, you won't be able to produce a site that provides a suitable brand experience.

UNIQUE CHALLENGE

Working with dotcoms was cited as one of the most fascinating, yet problematic types of project. Often, the agency may get involved when there's still only a few employees, some funding and a business plan, with little thought of what the brand should be. What's needed is a spot of brand modelling – working with the client so that you both understand what the brand's core values are. As Organic's Darryl Feldman explains, it involves sitting down and getting the client to express what they're about.

"We look at the words and phrases that they're using to describe themselves, and formulate that into a structure, creating what we call a brand map," he says. It includes information on the client's values, business proposition, target audience and competitors. "It's usually done with a combination of strategy people and creatives working together – it's not just a couple of designers. It involves a lot of workshops and brainstorming sessions."

The use of games is well established in various creative fields. Often, this can involve using analogies that have nothing to do with the Web. "We do workshops with dotcom clients to get to the heart of their brand," says Digit's Rob Cooke. "Is it an urban or rural brand? What colour is the brand? What does it smell like? We have different boxes they can smell. What does it feel like? We have other boxes they can stick their hands in to feel different textures."

All in all, Digit has 14 elements of this nature, with the end result being an insight into where the client's head is at. "Okay, it doesn't really mean much to say a brand is definitely sandalwood, nails, leather and the colour green," says Cooke. "But it does provide a creative genesis for us internally to start devising something."

So, finding out what animal your client feels its brand would be is actually relevant. The problem comes when you've got three stakeholders sitting in front of you, who disagree on whether their brand is a lion, an anteater or a hippo. With dotcoms, it's common to encounter disagreements among the different people constituting your client.

"Quite often, companies have rather schizophrenic notions of themselves," says Viant's Ian Worley. "The only way to get a core vision is to get all of the key stakeholders of a brand together and then tease it out in a workshop setting. They need to be able to discuss the ideas and values among themselves, ➤

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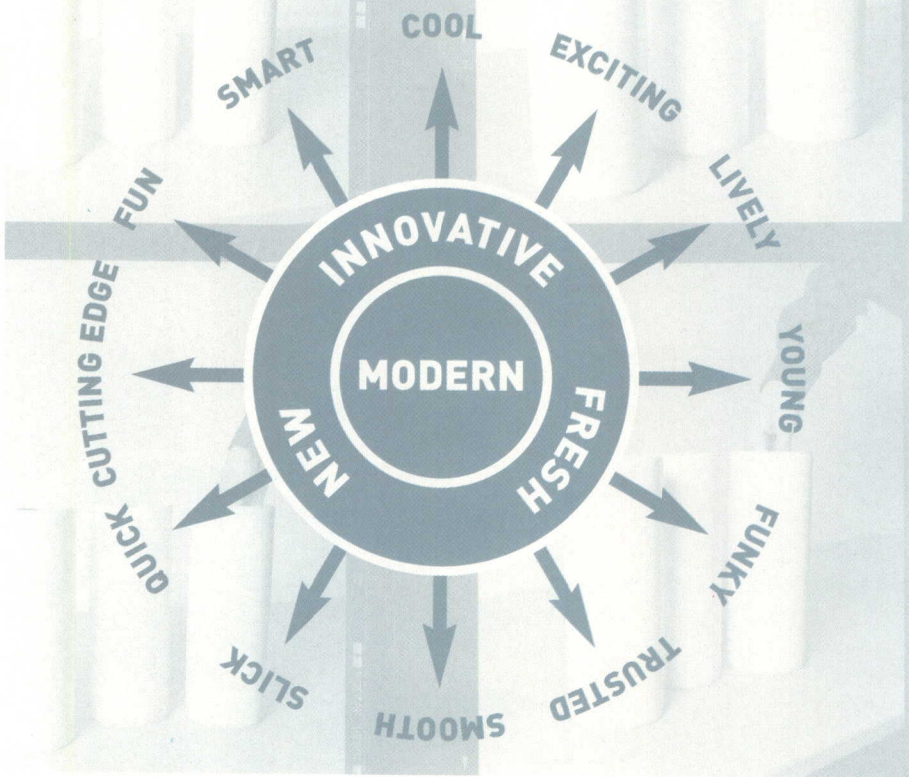

An example of a brand map, this shows the core values of a brand (centre), and other values it wishes to convey in the outer sections. Producing a map like this will help you get under the skin of your client's brand.

➤ within a suitable structure which drives towards conclusions or insights in the end."

The problem comes when they can't agree. By their very nature, startups tend to be headed by strong-willed individuals whose points of view don't always co-incide. "You've often got people who've put their heart and soul into this company," says Digit's Rob Cooke. "They may even have put their mortgage on the line. So there's a lot of passion behind it, which often means not a lot of agreement. It's our job to try to get some joint decisions on what they want."

BREAKING THE MOULD

Working with big offline brands presents its own very different set of challenges – not least because many have built up such a strong idea of what their brand means over the years. It's not uncommon for clients to turn up brandishing set-in-stone guidelines defining every aspect of its brand, with the expectation that it's all creatives will need to create the perfect website. Usually, this just isn't the case.

"Some clients turn up with a 200-page tome on brand guidelines, saying 'this is our brand'," says Traffic Interactive's Antony Wolfson. "But it's not. It's just the way they happen to express it. And if you express it like that, most people will either ignore it, or if they do use it, their creativity will be stifled."

With offline brands, getting under the skin of what the brand stands for is still important, but it's also crucial to make sure they're aware of how that may or may not translate to an online environment. "Often, when they come in to explain their brand, the missing link is interactivity," says Organic's Darryl Feldman. "They don't talk about how they think a brand should be expressed behaviourally. They talk about how it looks and how it reads, not how it acts and behaves. So the process is about asking them how we're going to translate their brand values into the experience on the website."

But with offline brands, the client's view is often less important than what its customers think. It's all very well to spend time with the client and work out what it thinks its brand stands for, but it's irrelevant if customers don't share the same beliefs. This is the reason why every creative director we talked to makes a point of encouraging their designers to get immersed in the brand, both from the perspective of employees and customers.

"WE LOOK AT THE WORDS AND PHRASES THAT THEY'RE USING TO DESCRIBE THEMSELVES, AND FORMULATE THAT INTO A STRUCTURE, CREATING A BRAND MAP" DARRYL FELDMAN, ORGANIC

LIVE IT, BREATHE IT, DO IT

Often, this can be fun. At AKQA, for example, designers have been known to have the chance to test-drive BMWs as part of the research process for working on sites for the car manufacturer. It might sound like an easy life, but it's actually a vital part of the overall process.

To take another example: if you're working on the site for a chain of hotels, you'll learn most about the company's brand by staying the night in one. What are the staff like? Is there room service? Are the towels clean? Answering these questions gives you the sort of knowledge that can be translated to a strong online brand.

It's also useful to go into the company and talk to employees, rather than just the marketing types who come to meetings with you. When Bomb Productions was working on the revamped Lego site, it sent its team into the Lego HQ to meet toy designers. "We learnt so much from being able to talk to the people who actually come up with the ideas for these toys. It's the sort of knowledge you couldn't get from just reading a set of brand guidelines."

This can even extend to seemingly innocuous aspects. "If you're working for someone like Microsoft, it's important to go down to its headquarters and see what the tea's like in the canteen," says AKQA's Daniel Bonner. A company's internal culture will offer valuable insights into whether its brand values are being carried across the board. After all, if its employees are unhappy, it's going to be extremely difficult to provide an effective online brand experience.

For the same reasons, you also need to find out how your client is viewed offline. "It's important to identify who the customers are, what they need and expect from the brand, and see how well the current brand has been serving those needs," says Viant's Ian Worley. "This information then needs to be synthesised into a communicable form, which demonstrates insight into the nature of the relationship between the brand and its customers."

Either way, whether you're working with a dotcom or an established brand, the onus is on you (and your creative director) to spend the initial weeks of a project getting under the skin of your client's brand. And it's something you should be doing with a critical eye too – assessing whether the values you're encountering can even be effectively communicated online. And if the process involves gently pointing out to the client that its brand isn't what it thinks it is, then so much the better. Unless, of course, it turns nasty. In which case, it's down to you to decide whether to follow the old maxim of the client always knowing best. ■

WORDS: **STUART DREDGE** / PHOTOGRAPHY: **NICK WILSON**

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ten top brands

Creating an effective online brand is a complex procedure. We find out if ten have managed it successfully.

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The clearest principle to come out of this issue's features is that there's more to branding than just looks. It's about the whole user experience – the interface and navigation, and also the non-Web elements, such as order fulfilment for ecommerce companies. That said, looks are important for providing a consistent visual style that reflects brand values of the company's brand.

We chose ten popular – or so we thought – online brands, and found out what designers and Internet users thought of them. Besides putting feelers out to our mailing list (www.egroups.com/createmag/), we put them up for discussion on our website forums and sought the opinions of the Internet users on the newsgroup for our sister title, *.net*.

TEXT: STUART DREDGE

_01

YAHOO

THE BRAND

One of the earliest – and most well-known online brands. As a search engine, it's been somewhat usurped by the likes of Google, but the Yahoo brand has since expanded into other community and ecommerce-based areas.

THE VERDICT

Yahoo's brand has been built over time, and it shows in the variety of relevant content and services contained under its umbrella. Getting in early has been crucial. "The fact that it was the first in terms of pure success gives it an edge in terms of being a well-known brand," says *.net* reader Blue. "To be a de facto standard, you have to be a first."

But not everyone was so impressed. "The website doesn't reflect the name of Yahoo. It's bland, basic and disappointing," says Andrew Paton of AGP Media. Still, others approved of the Yahoo brand's flexibility, where you can tinker with its look and feel to suit yourself.

w: **www.yahoo.co.uk**

_02

AOL

THE BRAND

US behemoth that's focused its brand over here as a content-stuffed ISP for people who are intimidated by going online. Recent TV ads have seen this brand represented by the worryingly smug Connie character .

THE VERDICT

AOL's branding has always been its strong point – through sheer effort as much as anything else. Yet its prolific mailshotting appears to have its critics. "It's maybe let down by the amount of CDs everyone gets sent through the post," says Andrew Paton, although he also concedes "it's a case of its branding." But AOL's content won approval from our respondents, being praised for a look and feel that would appeal to novice Web users. It seems both AOL and Freeserve have succeeded in their primary branding aims in this area.

w: **www.aol.com**

_03

AMAZON

THE BRAND

Books, CDs, videos, games... There seems to be no limits to Amazon's expansion plans. Despite periodic media coverage of its lack of profit, as a trusted ecommerce brand it continues to go from strength to strength.

THE VERDICT

Undoubted favourite of all the designers we spoke to. If a successful brand is defined by its customer experience, Amazon's service is a winner. "People aren't too sure what its logo looks like, but it's the service and experience they remember," says AKQA's Daniel Bonner. "That's why it's such a fantastic brand."

Amazon's brand hinges on its reliability, but also on its personalised recommendation service and easy ordering system. "The design reflects how all online shopping fronts should look," says *.net* reader Chris Lewis.

w: **www.amazon.co.uk**

_04

FREESERVE

THE BRAND

The free ISP boom started here. Since taking the UK market by storm, Freeserve has steadily ramped up the amount of content available through its service, complete with the catchy 'I found it on Freeserve' slogan.

THE VERDICT

Freeserve has benefitted from being the first high-profile free ISP – something that's made it a firm favourite in the branding stakes. Relying on providing accessibility to first-time Web users means it has to provide an unintimidating experience – and respondents agreed that its service reflects this. Freeserve has also established a strong visual brand. "It's solidly designed, achieves what it needs to, and people recognise the name, if not the logo itself," says *Cre@teOnline* forum member Dan NSource, who thought the same about QXL.

w: **www.freeserve.com**

_05

BOO

THE BRAND

The highest-profile dotcom casualty so far. Boo blazed into the online clothing market with its glitzy site, acres of marketing spend, and Miss Boo. But before long, it crashed to earth in an acrimonious end.

THE VERDICT

When it launched, Boo.com appeared to have mastered the visual side of brand identity. "It was very strong and funky," says Snow Valley designer George Ioannou. But the sheer scale of the high-end content and animation sending out negative brand messages was at the same time. "It had a vision of being the coolest company on the Web," says Dan NSource. "Sod Joe Public and what he wants."

Despite the delectable Miss Boo, it seems that the customer experience of the site was so un-userfriendly that the overall brand suffered a critical blow.

w: **www.boo.com (RIP)**

_06

BOXMAN

THE BRAND

Scandinavian music e-tailer, originally backed with finance from Swedish pop legends Roxette and Ace of Base. Recent advertising has focused on a man with a box on his head. Obviously.

THE VERDICT

Boxman's external branding hasn't been successful, judging by the reactions of our readers. Many didn't know the company at all: "For all I know it could be a box company!" quipped one *.net* reader. "The logo wouldn't tell you it had anything to do with music on its own," says TGM senior designer Donna. But Digit's Rob Cooke points out that the 'Box man' himself may have his uses. "It's a very interesting example of a marketing property," he says. "They can get him as the logo, animate him or whatever."

w: www.boxman.co.uk

_07

QXL

THE BRAND

Homegrown dotcom, currently going up against the might of Ebay for control of the potentially lucrative online auction market in the UK. At the time of writing, embroiled in a tricky merger with German firm Ricardo.

THE VERDICT

QXL was another example of a site that people have heard of, but many only through the offline publicity. So while the QXL name is well known, there aren't many with an opinion on how its site reflects the brand. Snow Valley's George Ioannou is one who does: "It's a good site, but the branding isn't that strong. I can't picture the logo in my head, which I think says it all."

By contrast, however, Preloaded's Rob Corradi is impressed. "Its logo is clever and simple, and gets across the excitement and the unique community feel of online auctions."

w: www.qxl.com

_08

EGG

THE BRAND

Online financial services provider, which has used a series of slick TV campaigns to get its message across to the general public. The aim, as with its rivals, has been to convince consumers that banking online is safe.

THE VERDICT

The financial services arena is subject to fierce competition, with online firms looking to steal the thunder from traditional banks, who in turn are setting up their own separate ventures to steal it right back.

Egg's site is seen as slick, reliable and easy to use – all important attributes for this kind of company. "It's clearly ahead of the pack in terms of its online branding," says designer Dom Murphy. "Why? Because its brand has remained pretty much constant since its launch, and its online and offline branding holds together as one."

w: www.egg.com

_09

BBC

THE BRAND

With the Beeb seeing online as the third prong of its strategy, alongside TV and radio, bbc.com has had plenty of resources put into it. Best known for its comprehensive news and sports coverage, even outside the UK.

THE VERDICT

Sadly, despite having the BBC interactive creative director as a forum contributor, we didn't get any opinions from the horse's mouth, so to speak. But the Beeb's site seems to have established itself as an authoritative brand – crucial in the news arena. And it's no shallow site either. "It use its website as a constant reference for more information," says Zinc's Ken Frakes.

Viewers appear to be clear what the BBC stands for, and this is emphasised by the tone of voice used throughout the site. "Because of the style of writing, and also the layout, I trust what I read on there," says reader David Black.

w: www.bbc.co.uk

_10

LASTMINUTE

THE BRAND

Let's ignore the share price fluctuations – precious little attention has been focused in recent months on what Lastminute.com actually does. Travel, gig tickets, hotels, whatever.

THE VERDICT

Lastminute.com's offline branding is seen as impressive – although it hasn't always tied in with the site's look and feel. "The new look is a lot friendlier than the last one, and mirrors its offline branding," says Dom Murphy. However, he also criticised the site for feeling "buggy" – and he wasn't alone.

"It's a bit manic on the colour," thinks TGM senior designer Donna, "but it does portray a fun site." Preloaded's Rob Corradi also points out that while the visuals might not suit all, "its reputation has been built on bargains and choice, one on which it still delivers." ■

w: www.lastminute.com

Ready, steady... go

Clean design, a functional website and a flexible corporate identity has made a premier low-cost airline. In our first branding case study, we take a look at GO

BRAND: PROVIDING LOW-COST AIRFARES TO EUROPEAN CITIES
BRAND VALUES: SIMPLICITY, VALUE FOR MONEY, USER-FRIENDLINESS AND FUN

"Go has differentiated itself from other budget airlines by positioning itself as modern, stylish and professional in a sector in which some rivals were perceived as inconvenient and unreliable." The hyperbole of an over-enthusiastic executive, right? Wrong. They're actually the words of Sir Michael Perry announcing Go, the European low-cost airline, as New Brand of the Year at the recent Marketing Society Awards held at the Grosvenor Hotel in London.

Created in 1997 as British Airways' response to the deregulation of the European aviation market, Go has combined a strong position in a niche market with even stronger brand values, resulting in consistently increasing sales and a rising percentage of online bookings. "Go set up with the aim of being as straightforward and as direct in its messaging as possible," says Jenny Taylor, Go's Internet sales and marketing manager. "It doesn't matter whether you're an offline brand or an online one, it's about the transposition of your brand values, what they actually are and whether they're echoed in the services you offer. I think our Go brand represents simplicity, value for money, user friendliness and fun."

Go was orginally brought to life by Wolff Olins, the company also responsible for putting those little dots after Open and placing the piper on the BT logo. The corporate identity gurus created Go's complete image from scratch, from its logo with the brightly coloured circles to how the planes looked in the sky and the material of the seats onboard. Although Wolff Olins had quite an input with the website, making sure the visual identity online echoed its offline presence, the job of replicating the real-world success fell to Internet solutions company Workzone.

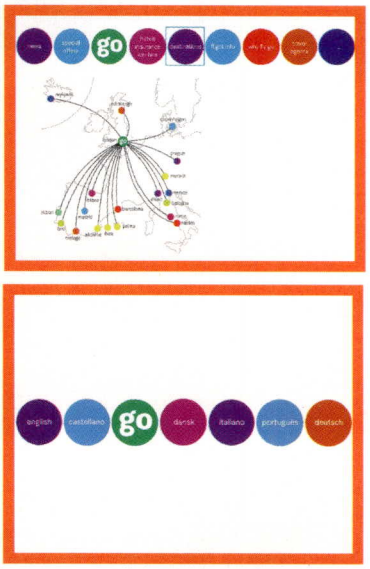
The Sussex-based agency was in no doubt about the steps it needed to follow. "Everyone involved in the project was given very clear guidelines as to how the actual identity should be applied," says managing director, Denise Pritchard. "The site is designed in frames so the logo always appears in a consistent position in the page." Having someone already pave the way for an online existence was a new experience for Denise and her team.

"Offline brands have often been developed in isolation from online consideration," she says. "We're now seeing a trend where people are designing much more with a view as to how things are going to work in a digital environment. With the Go logo, Wolff Olins created something which was extremely flexible. Its Sans Serif face gives it a clean and clear look that works really well on the Web. Some of the other brands out there using six-colour logos or graduated tints will find they won't be able to transfer to an online environment quite as effectively. When you're creating a corporate identity now you've also got to design it so it can be used in lots of different sizes. For example, the Go logo is ideal for this but PriceWaterhouseCoopers isn't exactly the catchiest name in the world, and you can forget about trying to shrink that down to put it on a button."

> "Go is a European brand. Our tone has to appeal to a continent-wide audience"
> Jenny Taylor, Go

With the corporate identity easily transferable, Workzone needed to develop a site that reflected the brand values of Go itself. "We had to make the navigation very simple and clear to understand," says Denise. "It really reflects the whole ethos of Go. It's cheap travel but it's not cheap and nasty; it's low cost but it's quality. I think that comes across in the cleanliness of the site and the use of the circles in the navigation." Workzone was also required to create a site that reached a target audience covering all ages. Hence the quick download times and the fact that the site works on "everything from a high-spec PC in a corporate environment to a home user working on

Denise Pritchard (top) of Workzone handled the project set by Go's Jenny Taylor (bottom).



Go's uncluttered opening page reflects the European nature of its business.

an old 486 with a 56k modem".

Easy access was a factor in Go's win at the Marketing Society Awards. So too was the site's multi-lingual capabilities. "Go is a European brand," says Jenny. "Our tone has to appeal to a continent-wide audience. Spain and Denmark are different market places, so copy must work within the locally run campaigns. Although UK sales are still growing, the fastest rise comes from Denmark, Italy and Spain, where people are starting to trust online booking."

However, Go is not content to rest on its laurels. Workzone continues to work on the project, while the desire to expand into new distribution channels and to update the website's interactivity has led to Oyster coming onboard. The Islington-based agency will incorporate cross-sell services such as car hire and hotel bookings on the same server.

There's not really too much to improve though. Over 80 per cent of customers rated the service as good or excellent in a recent survey and that extends to the website as well. "One of the greatest compliments we've been paid is that the site's a very non-threatening and user-friendly experience," says Denise. "It's often forgotten that a lot of people are new to doing business online." ■

TEXT: **KEITH DREW**
w: **www.go-fly.com**
w: **www.wolff-olins.com**
w: **www.workzone.co.uk**

anyone game?

Appealing to both gamers and soft content enthusiasts alike has helped Gameplay conquer the Web. Our second case study reveals brand extension as the next step

BRAND: PROVIDING ONLINE GAMING AND SELLING FOR THE GAMING COMMUNITY
BRAND VALUES: PASSION, ENTHUSIASM AND FUN

Buying the Wireplay/IC merger was a big step for Gameplay. Incorporating direct mail customers with online gamers called for a brand review, and a large one at that. What followed was a lot of probing and a fair bit of soul searching.

"We carried out about three months of heavy research between autumn and the New Year," says Steven Blackburn, Gameplay's online marketing director. "We knew that we were at the start of a new business, and we had ambitious expansion plans, both across different mediums and into other territories. We needed something flexible that would let us enter all these other markets."

And so the tag 'Gameplay: Europe's gateway to games' was born. "The nature of our company is very new media, be it Web, WAP, or iDTV," says Steven. "We wanted it to be that wherever people went in terms of media, Gameplay would introduce them to games: whether soft games, hardcore, online multiplayer games or console."

Accessing Gameplay across all mediums led to the company making an important decision about its identity. Bucking the current trend, it decided to drop the 'dotcom' from its name. "We wanted something that wouldn't be used up in a year," explains Steven. "Dotcoms have become established very quickly. Two or three years ago, hardly anyone was working in new media, but now it's huge and the next big thing has become WAP, or ADSL or whatever. If you want to build a brand for the long term you have to build something that's flexible enough to develop and change. It's important to look towards the core values and not to get too hung up on the technology. Ultimately, the technology is just an enabler: it's a means of introducing yourselves to potential customers across the world."

The essence of gameplay boils down to its three word catchline: buy, play and talk. "That's essentially what we do," admits Steven. "We sell games, we give people the chance to play games and, just as importantly for a sense of community, we provide a forum for people to talk about games."

A community atmosphere is just as important at the company itself. Gameplay has produced a branding book and CD discussing the company's values that everyone gets on their first day at work. "It's all done very tongue-in-cheek, but it really boosts the atmosphere in the office," says Steven. "We hire people who buy into the vision and understand what we're trying to do, which helps us communicate our passion for games into our reviews. It also aids the stance we take. We value our independence seriously, and our ability to say and do things that a lot of companies tend to shy away from. We can't afford to be afraid of rocking the boat. Our customers have come to expect absolute honesty as another of our brand values."

Gameplay's customers include the predicted core market of young males, but the company discovered during research that the age of its customers ranged from six to sixty. Appealing to such a diverse group can be quite difficult, but Gameplay looks to another

Steven Blackburn is sure of Gameplay's success across media.

"IT'S IMPORTANT TO LOOK TOWARDS THE CORE VALUES AND NOT TO GET TOO HUNG UP ON TECHNOLOGY. ULTIMATELY, TECHNOLOGY IS JUST AN ENABLER: IT'S A MEANS OF INTRODUCING YOURSELVES TO POTENTIAL CUSTOMERS"
STEVEN BLACKBURN, GAMEPLAY

gameplay

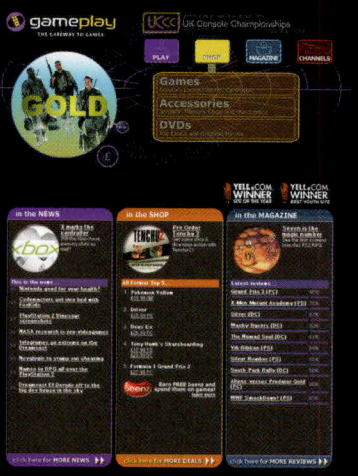
THE GATEWAY TO GAMES

market for help. "We try to learn from Nike," admits Steven. "It's a company which can appeal to anyone. It's still got that kind of coolness, but then your gran could also wear a pair of Nike trainers because she'd associate them with quality. It's about trying to capture an essence of your brand like that and having the ability to communicate those values."

For a gaming site, communicating brand values is not so much about overcoming the hurdles of age as it is about differentiating between certain types of gamer. "The Wireplay gaming element is very hardcore, they almost have their own language," explains Steven. "You have to talk to these people and give them reviews in a certain style. But then there's also the people who just want to read about games and play soft content games like cards and so on."

Employing microsites has gone some way towards helping this. "With such a range of people visiting the Gameplay site, a lot of them come for specific things," adds Steven. "We've given particular demographics their own area, with the Football, Pokemon, Speed, Fizz, and Fresh microsites. It means that they can create their own community and we can target specific features at them."

Microsites are advancing Gameplay's Web position, but the company is also looking to expand its brand elsewhere. It's already got a WAP site up and running, and has recently been involved with the BT Openworld trials. In addition to this, autumn marks the debut of *Blam!*, a Saturday morning gaming programme produced for Sky. "It's being shown to a kind of Ant and Dec age range, which is slightly below where we normally aim – so there's lots of questions as to how we develop this frontier," comments Steven.



Buy, play, talk: the Gameplay site enables gamers to do all three. And if you want to try it out on the move, the WAP site can also serve your needs.

The company is aware that it has to address the Web as well, and is looking to consolidate its current standing. "The Web is still a highly contested market with new competitors and new technology entering the fray every day," concludes Steven. "It's challenging, but that also makes it very vibrant and very exciting. It's not dull, to say the least." ■

TEXT: **KEITH DREW**

web: **www.gameplay.com**
wap: **mobile.gameplay.com**

bank on it

Rebranding ten months ago has put NatWest in an enviable position online. In the final case study, the bank tells us about transferring its brand to the Web

BRAND: PROVIDING AN ONLINE BANKING SERVICE FOR CUSTOMERS

BRAND VALUES: INNOVATIVE, EMPOWERING AND FUN

Innovative, empowering, and fun. Not the first words most people would associate with their bank. But they are the words that best represent NatWest, according to the company's initiative manager, Marc Ames. "When I say 'fun' I don't mean in a frivolous way," he says. "More that people actually enjoy using us."

This more human image has been reflected in NatWest's recent 'Another Way' advertising campaign run by TBWA GGT. However, the campaign, which includes the ads where an old woman complains that her bank has become a trendy wine bar, would never have worked without a serious shift in direction several months ago. Research carried out within NatWest found that a significant number of both clients and staff weren't happy with the way the bank was going. NatWest had to react to win back its clientele and a new image represented the best way to go about it. "We have been evolving our position since the RBS group takeover," says Marc. "This was the momentum we needed to overhaul our services, so we decided to rebrand and set up an ecommerce unit that would deliver Internet banking."

Creating Internet banking at the same time as start-ups such as Egg and Smile meant the rebrand had to be visually fresh and exciting but without losing the weight and trust of the established brand. NatWest looked at several agencies but finally settled on Razorfish, believing that the city-based designers were best equipped to work with TBWA GGT to ensure synergy with the TV advertising. "An online presence can extend the brand but it must also create something that reflects your original values," says Marc. "You can't make it so far removed that people are suddenly no longer sure if what you're presenting is really NatWest."

Razorfish was given the task of literally dismantling an online presence and putting it back together again, both technically and in terms of brand communication. "NatWest had a real change of plan, most of which was trying to win back some of the ground it had lost," says Paul Cleghorn, senior designer at Razorfish. "It was trying to unalienate a lot of people and to appear friendly again. Representing this new branding was tricky because we were designing the site at the same time as the TV work was being done which meant we didn't really have anything to go on."

> "AN ONLINE PRESENCE CAN EXTEND THE BRAND, BUT IT MUST ALSO CREATE SOMETHING THAT REFLECTS YOUR ORIGINAL VALUES"
> MARC AMES, NATWEST

Once the appearance was sorted out, constructing the site itself proved little problem. "It took a long time to build the look and feel of the site but the actual content side of it was quite thin," says Paul. "NatWest already had over 2000 pages in HTML that they'd done inhouse and there was no way that we had time in the space of two months to re-do their entire site. Instead, we just built a new layer over the top. All the old info is still there but rather than sending customers down a really tortuous route to get where they want, we added nice jumping off points at specific parts of the site and built multiple routes to get there," he says. "The information is controlled in a much better way. It's much more fluid."

Razorfish's contract with NatWest was more than just the website, though. The agency started defining all the digital channels about a year ago and decided to start with the Web. "We looked at how the branding sat with the whole architecture of communicating with the customers," says Paul. "From the one-to-one of WAP, to the one-to-everything of TV."

The result was E-dentity, a brandbook based around an intranet site that integrates brand strategy and online

Paul Cleghorn led the design-offensive on the NatWest site.

Thanks to its E-dentity brandbook, NatWest will have a consistent style on TV, WAP and the Web.

style guidelines. The E-dentity project recognises that new digital channels combine branding areas that have traditionally been separate – so now the look and feel of a website and the level of service it offers should be perceived as one by online customers. "We created a grid for the different channels that showed typography, graphical elements, navigation and information design," explains Paul. "Anyone that starts working on any NatWest project in the future can select the information they need. If they follow these guidelines then it should look spot-on."

NatWest is currently having trials with Orange and is looking to roll out WAP services later this year. The company is also in discussions with a number of parties about iDTV work. Razorfish is back working with them after a break and is looking to add channels to the NatWest portfolio. "The creation of the E-dentity brandbook means it's just a case of applying the rules to these new channels," says Paul. "It's not as big a deal as it originally was. It's all sat there ready to go.

"Well, at least in theory," he grins. ■

TEXT: **KEITH DREW**
w: **www.natwest.com**
w: **www.razorfish.co.uk**

The brand makers

the big issue

Name: **Matt Groves**
Age: **31**
Role: **CEO**
Company: **64K**
Background: **Matt set his company up in 1996. Before that, he was in "the creative advertising industry for ten years."**

Name: **Rob Cooke**
Age: **30**
Role: **Strategic marketing director**
Company: **Digit**
Background: **After college, Rob spent a couple of years client-side for Walker Smiths in its retail department. He then went into advertising with TWA as an account handler, went freelance, and then joined Circus for two years. All of which brought him to Digit.**

Name: **Paul Castro**
Age: **38**
Role: **MD**
Company: **BlackServe**
Background: **Paul has been involved in media for the last 15 years. He set up the sales channel on CompuServe, then got head-hunted by Double Click and set up its UK operation in 1997. Paul then went on to set up BlackServe.**

IN A SPECIAL ONE-OFF, *CRE@TEONLINE* ASKS FOUR BRAND EXPERTS TO CAST A CRITICAL EYE OVER THE SOON-TO-BE LAUNCHED SITE BLACKSERVE, AND OFFER UP SOME SUGGESTIONS TO MAXIMISE THE SITE'S BRANDING POTENTIAL

Name: **David Hurren**
Age: **35**
Role: **Executive creative director**
Company: **Ogilvy Interactive UK**
Background: **David has been at Ogilvy for three years. Before that, he ran a number of small interactive businesses, and prior to this, he worked in print for ten years for clients like BA and other high street retail brands.**

Name: **Janette Mooney**
Age: **30**
Role: **Creative director**
Company: **Grey Interactive**
Background: **Janette was employed a year and a half ago to set up the creative department at Grey Interactive – the department now has 22 people. She has been in new media for seven years.**

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Name:	BlackServe (www.blackserve.co.uk)
Brainchild of:	Paul Castro
The idea:	To create an online community for black people which covers news, sports, entertainment, education and more. He also wants it to offer a viable platform for generating revenue. "With the take-off of the Web, a lot of the major mainstream sites such as AOL are finding it more and more difficult to fulfil all the needs of their potential users. There's a need for niche areas to be looked after."
The reason:	"We hope to roll out to 14 channels eventually. We are launching with two channels, news and entertainment. One of the things we've done with the news channel is break it down into four different regions all relevant to black people – UK, US, Caribbean and Africa. The reason? Well, if you try and get this info normally, you'll probably have to go to 15 sites to get what you want. So we're developing our own content and I have 22 journos at my disposal who generate 40 news stories every day which are relevant to a black audience. We've done it all ourselves because we need people to understand that BlackServe can deliver and that we understand the diversity of the black community."
The content:	"The audience we're looking for is probably not going to be the most Web savvy. Another thing was that the audience is also going to be very diverse – it could well be made up of different religious backgrounds, different languages, and created by people from different parts of the world."
The audience:	"It is very important that the site can be used as a vehicle for the advertising marketeers to actually get into the black community. If, as a company, you have spent a lot of money on your creative and your brand, you don't really want to go and sit on someone's site that looks like it cost 10p to create, which appears to be the case with most other black sites. BlackServe will offer advertisers a stylish and relevant platform for their brands."
The future:	"We must make sure that the brand is right and that we're attracting the relevant eyeballs – but more importantly, attracting eyeballs that can help us generate revenues. We intend to release the first two channels and then launch two more shortly afterwards. We will probably launch them in pairs as we go along: so, for example, a travel channel which has opportunities for revenue-making will be launched alongside a legal channel. The former generates revenue, the latter generates eyeballs."

EXPLORING THE IDEA

DAVID: If I was a 35-year-old Trinidadian living in the UK, what does BlackServe give me, in a nutshell?

PAUL: As a black person, there is no home for you on the Web. For example, there are black people who use the Web and want to know what's going on in Jamaica or Africa. They don't want to go to the Web and have to go to different sites to find the info relevant to them. They want to go somewhere where they can get everything they want in one place.

DAVID: Is it an aggregation tool?

PAUL: Yeah, one of the things we want to do is prove we understand the community. We've already indicated that we know our black audience as illustrated by the physical aspects of our news service. We've achieved this by asking people in our target market what they think and all of them are pleased. To them, it makes sense.

ROB: The key to all of this is the target audience obviously. You have identified a very diverse target audience by geography, religion and cultural differences, but there's got to be a common thread behind all of this – why these seemingly diverse people will all come to the same site. So the common thread of need is what I would want to define first because these people are coming with very different needs, so there's got to be one. I think it will be down to an attitudinal need more than anything else.

In terms of attitude, what kind of personality or character would you associate with your site?

PAUL: If the site was someone, it would be Ian Wright. He's funny and he happens to be black. Like Richard Blackwood, he's a great person because he has respect in the black community. We don't want to be Frank Bruno or Chris Eubank.

DAVID: If you're talking about offering streams of news which is relevant to Nigerians etc., how do you deliver that news in a Richard Blackwood way to each of those streams of people?

PAUL: What I'm trying to say is that you create the environment first of all which is a 'Richard Blackwood'. Once you get there, you'll then get the substance and content.

MATT: What websites out there would you put yourself against? What are you? An MSN? A Yahoo!? An Excite? The problem is that there is no rationalisation here for me in regards to exactly what you are.

PAUL: I suppose we could be like an MSN but a black version of it.

MATT: That's a good starting point for me.

JANETTE: How long is the brand going to survive on being the first black website?

PAUL: We're not the first one.

JANETTE: The best then. How long is the brand going to survive? You talked initially about: 'Oh look great, a site for black people'. Fine. They go back again and 'Oh look great'? Is that just for the launch or is it going to have longevity?

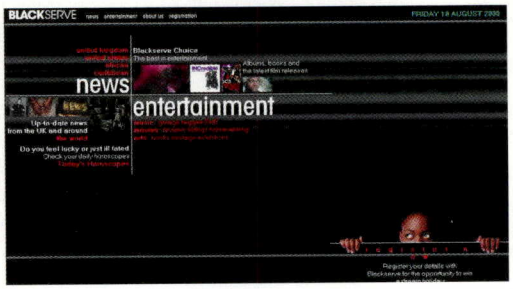
PAUL: I think it's going to have longevity. As more and more people go to the Web, there's always going to be a need for this sort of stuff on the Web. We think the timing is about right: if we can get the brand values right at this point, then there's an opportunity for taking something offline.

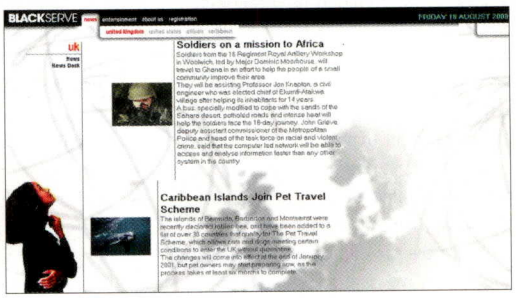
DAVID: Do you think it would possible to do what you're doing without actually having the word Black within the brand?

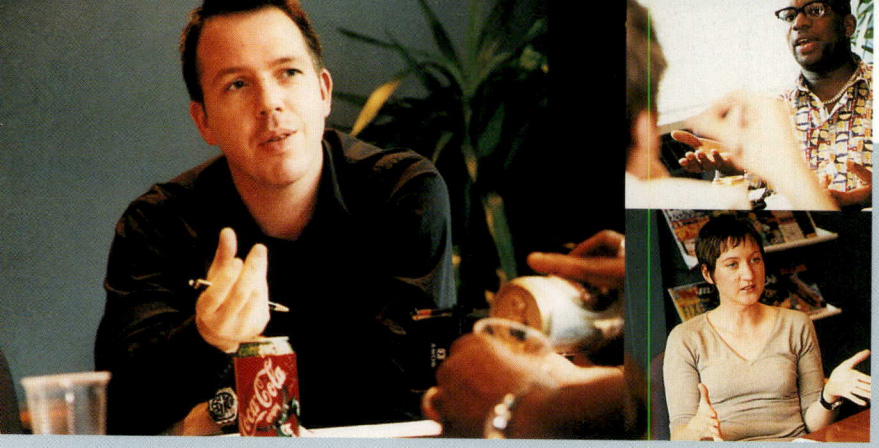
ROB: It's not what you are, it's about how you are thinking.

DAVID: Yeah, in a way my feeling is that everything you're describing sounds great, but at the same time it almost feels like some of those qualities will work against you. It's almost like the things you're kicking against, saying that there is a preconception of what a black site would be like, you seem to be in some ways actually echoing those very things you're kicking against.

Users are presented with a white-on-black layout on BlackServe's homepage. From here, punters can click through one of the two channels – in this case, news. This leads into headline highlights from four different global regions – UK, US, Africa and Caribbean. Then clicking on UK for instance, brings up Blighty's stories and the layout changes revealing a black-on-white layout with a suitable world map in the background. More importantly, this is where Paul's idea of using black faces is properly introduced. He has over 650 images of faces to choose from and eventually will use them on the site to help establish BlackServe's visual brand. However, the general consensus was that he needed to use such images on all the site's pages – the branders felt the images were the most striking visual element of the site and should be fully exploited.







"IF YOU CAN'T TELL ME YOUR MISSION STATEMENT WITHOUT WRITING 25 PAGES ON WHAT YOU'RE DOING, YOU'RE NOT GOING TO BE ABLE TO TELL THE PUNTER ON THE STREET"

ROB: Yeah, just in terms of defining the proposition and getting it really succinct is paramount. That is what is going to drive so many issues for your company as well as the brand in terms of who your alliances will be with, your content definition and your editorial tone. We've defined a diversity in the target audience but still, what is the commonality? Is the commonality that everyone is black? There's got to be more than that – there's got to be more commonality.

PAUL: We could not find one though – that's why we kept it very simple and kept it as BlackServe. The only one common thing is black.

MATT: I don't see anything wrong in that. There is a need there and there is a motivation for black people to go to a website. But again what do you call this? Is it a publishing website? You seem to be talking about becoming a publisher – you own and create your own content.

PAUL: Initially, I decided we should take a lot of control over the content that we put on our site because if you do look at the selection of black sites that are out there, they have links all over the place. There's no control, there's no focus to what they are providing, and you end up diluting your brand.

MATT: I like the fact you're going to become a publisher – you create and own the content – obviously that is another string of revenue in terms of syndication. The original content idea and the 40 news stories-a-day idea is a strong USP.

JANETTE: Your substantiation is your content so that's the reason why you can say: "Well, I can speak for this community on the Web because I've got content that nobody else is going to have."

PAUL: Yeah, that's it! We have 40 stories. Other black properties out there don't do the same number that we do. I've seen ten stories at most on any one site, and we asked ourselves, could we produce far more? And it is possible so we have worked out a mechanism to do that. So, as a black person, you can come to our site each day and you know you've probably got the most comprehensive black news that's relevant to you.

ROB: About the business plan, are you targeting black people on the Web or black people in the community to drag them on to the Web?

PAUL: I don't know the answer to that.

ROB: Well, it's vast difference in your business plan.

JANETTE: Because if you look at how much AOL would spend on ATL advertising, it seems to have taken that responsibility to trust the medium.

DAVID: Do you know how much of the potential audience are online? Do you know what the split is?

PAUL: If anything, the penetration of PCs is higher in Asian communities than elsewhere. The black population is the same as the white population in numbers online.

ROB: Do you know what the split is between home and office usage? That will also define a big element of the brand. That needs to be kept at the front of your mind when you are developing a brand because access defines so many aspects of functionality on the site as well – your bandwidth, graphic heavy/text heavy, and all that kind of stuff. We've just done a travel site and it's for backpacking hippies all over the world, and the greatest problem for us is the actual functionality of someone who is using a 14.4 modem in Bangladesh. It restricts and defines so much of what the brand can be about.

PAUL: That's why we sat down and tried to come up with ways to construct, compress and squash the site to make it as fast as possible, because the first thing I told our Web design company was that the audience I'm trying to reach haven't got a clue. They are going to be the least Web savvy. The site also has to be swift because if you have some ragamuffin man sitting in front of a computer, the last thing you want him to do is to sit there and go: "I can't find nothing!" That's what we tried to think about in our design when we tried to work out how to navigate the site. Ultimately, if you go to BlackServe, we want to establish that it should be your one-stop shop for the black person online.

BANDING ROUND BRANDS

MATT: What we have tried to do here is to rationalise down to what BlackServe is and your last comment after all this discussion was it – it's a one-stop shop for Black Britain.

PAUL: If I'd said that first though, it would have just conjured up all these misconceptions that go through people's minds when they hear something like that and, in this particular forum, I think it's important to understand what's behind it.

MATT: I understand that. What I'm trying to say is that when we work, we try to put ourselves in the shoes of the person or the target audience we are trying to reach. What I wanted to get most out of this was that you've got lots of ideas for the site now and where it's going to go. It is a Black MSN in a way and I think it's good to use terms like that because at least it helps you rationalise what it is you're trying to talk about. We've gotten to how you want to create the tone, personality and attitude – Ian Wright or Richard Blackwood – which I like because that also helps with the crossover to a white audience. The fact your site is essentially all content-driven and the fact that you own all that content is a very strong USP for me. I just think people need a starting point on what BlackServe is: 'What's it got for me? What's it going to have in the future?' Those are the things you need to get across in a quick, succinct way. That's your biggest problem at the moment.

PAUL: The strap line at the moment is: 'Serving the black community online', and I still don't feel like it's the right one.

MATT: It's not succinct.

PAUL: So what do you think of 'one-stop shop for the black person online'?

MATT: It's okay but obviously there's a lot more work that needs to be done. It's like trying to create your own mission statement. I always ask my clients: 'Right, what is your mission statement?' And no-one ever knows. If you can write that

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down first, that's where we can start from because if you can't tell me without having to write 25 pages about what you're doing, you're not going to be able to tell the punter on the street.

ROB: Also, you need a credibility of style, attitude and content. Your content is signed off but the attitude and style are the hardest things. Ultimately, the proposition has to be really, really defined. I can understand it's been a really hard task to define a proposition, but it's got to be something concrete.

PAUL: That's the bottom line, that's the one thing I feel we don't have.

ROB: Defining that proposition is going to be tough – we find that people in the company are the best to do it because the ideas are within these people's hearts and minds. You have to let people just express themselves in a way that they really know. Once you've got it defined though, you've got to write it down as something that can't be rubbed out, so to speak. Then everyone in the company has to understand the goal.

PAUL: We haven't got that tag line yet though...

ROB: It's not just a tag line. It's more about: 'This is what we're about'. The best way of doing that is to look at who else has created successful communities and forums for unrepresented minorities.

PAUL: Like who?

ROB: For example, Jewish Net has done a fantastic job, a great commercial job as well – but it's a very unrepresented community in the national media.

PAUL: No, it's not the same. It has established products within its community which cut across that community: it's not like *The Voice* which only covers part of the black community. Choice FM as a radio station only covers part of the black community. *The Jewish Chronicle* covers everything. It's like *The Irish Post*, that covers the entire Irish community in the country. The black community doesn't have that.

ROB: My point wasn't that you should use the exact model of another community. My point is that what we can possibly define is something that stretches commonality, which is an attitude, and you've had a hard time trying to define that attitude in terms of the focus groups you've done because everyone has gone: 'I'm me, really. And all right, I've got things that make me up but I'm me', but there must be a commonality that should be the core thread to the proposition because that commonality is what Blackserve can represent or can reflect in terms of everything it is going to give to you. That's going to be tough.

DAVID: There are two elements that bother me – one is the name and the other, as we've discussed, is the proposition. In a way, the proposition – 'one-stop shop for the black community' – is far too woolly for me. If I was sitting in a planning meeting in our agency today and was to put that up as our proposition, they would be waiting for me to write out the 10-15 other things that would explain how that unwrapped. I'd want a definition about how, within all these channels and all these things that you have built, how you would create an overall product which will succeed equally in all those areas. I also get the sense that you know what your audience will react to i.e. they want news; they would like lots of it; they would like it in one place, and it will make them feel good because it will be a real touch point for them.

By the same token, I think that will limit you in the long term because you're wrapping yourself in a set of parameters which will be hard for you to develop as a business further down the line. Part of that for me is wrapped up in the name. I was thinking about the way Benetton, through *Colors*, has celebrated the nature of differences between various religions, colours, creeds and attitudes generally and there is an overall feeling of uplift about that celebration of difference. I'd like to see some of that here so you could conceivably say that I, as a white bloke, could go to your site and it'd still be an interesting place for me – if you like, *my* one-stop shop as well – but no less relevant to the people who we've been talking about this afternoon. That, I think, is the bigger nut to crack and more attractive to the people you'll be approaching from a commercial stand point.

PAUL: Definitely.

MURMURS OF AGREEMENT

DAVID: And it's completely open-ended. If you're my one-stop shop, I might want to go there and do my online banking. That might be a deal you could do with Egg. I think that's where you should be looking to – the smart way to give certain sets of people the things that they want.

PAUL: Yes, I think that opening up has got to be our next move to really try and get it across that. Although we do it to serve the black community or as a one-stop shop for black people, it's really there for everybody. ■

"WE'VE DEFINED A DIVERSITY IN THE TARGET AUDIENCE BUT STILL, WHAT IS THE COMMONALITY? IS IT THAT EVERYONE IS BLACK? THERE'S GOT TO BE MORE THAN THAT"

THE SWOT FILES

BLACKSERVE – WHAT ARE ITS STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES? WHAT NEEDS ADDRESSING AND JUST WHAT IS IT GETTING RIGHT?

STRENGTHS

- **BlackServe boasts its own content and has more of it than any of the current crop of black sites out there.**
- **The makers have enthusiasm, a mass of ideas and an intelligent and well-thought out site structure to reach the diverse nature of its target audience.**

WEAKNESSES

- **BlackServe is still having problems nailing down its proposition in a precise, easy-to-digest and attractive way. It took one and a half hours for our 'branders' to get enough concrete information about the proposition before they could start offering branding advice.**

OPPORTUNITIES

- **To exploit the fact that Blackserve is seemingly the first fully-financed and solidly designed black website to hit the Net.**
- **To become the definitive black site so that advertisers will want to put their brands on this one first. It should be the first port of call for any company who wants to break into the black market with its products.**

THREATS

- **Not consolidating its proposition and it remaining 'woolly'. It could be a magnificent opportunity lost because of the lack of a succinct mission statement at present.**

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- 20 POP E-mail Accounts
- **FREE** FrontPage® 2000 Extensions
- Detailed Account User Statistics
- **FREE** Web-based Control Panel
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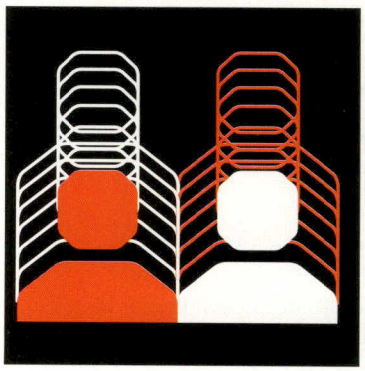

REVIEWS

It's the people who are making it happen and the software is helping that process along. Over the next 23 pages, we talk to the professionals to find out what sites are catching their eye. And then we scrutinize the latest software to hit the shelves and ask what it means for Web designers. Read on...

P82 **CHRIS MCGRAIL,** KLEBER
P84 **KATE SCLATER,** AMX STUDIOS
P86 **ROB LOWE, DAVE TOWERS,** MGUS
P88 **JIM MCNIVEN,** KERB
P90 **BEN GHOST,** DESIGN NET
P90 **SIMON SCOTT,** NOOMEDIA
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SOFTWARE

P96 **FLASH 5 BETA**
P101 **XMETAL 2.0**
P102 **SIGNPOSTER 3**
P102 **FLASHMASTER**

RATINGS GUIDE

●●●●●	DON'T MISS IT
●●●●○	RECOMMENDED
●●●○○	WORTH A LOOK
●●○○○	DODGY
●○○○○	DON'T BUY

on the streets

THIS MONTH, *CRE@TEONLINE* WENT OUT TO THE CULTURAL MELTING POT THAT IS COVENT GARDEN TO FIND OUT WHICH BRAND ON THE INTERNET HAS THE MOST IMPACT ON THE STREETS

_1 **LAURENT ALBERT**
Puppet animator
AGE: 25
FAVOURITE WEBSITE: www.ledevoir.com
SHOE SIZE: 8
WHEN YOU THINK OF THE INTERNET, WHAT'S THE FIRST SITE THAT SPRINGS TO MIND? www.hotmail.com

_2 **JOE FARRINGTON-DOUGLAS**
International leader for EF
AGE: 21
FAVOURITE WEBSITE: www.steadman.co.uk
SHOE SIZE: 8-1/2
FIRST SITE THAT SPRINGS TO MIND? www.yahoo.co.uk

_3 **BEN MCLANNISS**
Fine Art student
AGE: 21
FAVOURITE WEBSITE: www.nofx.com
SHOE SIZE: 10
FIRST SITE THAT SPRINGS TO MIND? www.ntl.com

_4 **ZACK BRADFORD**
Engineer
AGE: 20
FAVOURITE WEBSITE: www.vw.com
SHOE SIZE: 9
FIRST SITE THAT SPRINGS TO MIND? www.aol.com

_5 **CHRIS ROGERS**
Graphic designer
AGE: 26
FAVOURITE WEBSITE: www.volumeone.com
SHOE SIZE: 10
FIRST SITE THAT SPRINGS TO MIND? www.page3.com

_6 **MICHELLE APLIN**
Nurse
AGE: 22
FAVOURITE WEBSITE: www.hotmail.com
SHOE SIZE: 4
FIRST SITE THAT SPRINGS TO MIND? www.amazon.com

_7 OLIVER CORBETT
Student

AGE: 17
FAVOURITE WEBSITE: www.hotmail.com
SHOE SIZE: 10
FIRST SITE THAT SPRINGS TO MIND? www.wetandwild.com

_8 PAULA CHAVEZ
Student

AGE: 19
FAVOURITE WEBSITE: www.nme.com
SHOE SIZE: 4
FIRST SITE THAT SPRINGS TO MIND? www.microsoft.com

_9 LARS VOLTE
Wholesale buyer

AGE: 19
FAVOURITE WEBSITE: www.yahoo.com
SHOE SIZE: 12
FIRST SITE THAT SPRINGS TO MIND? www.yahoo.com

_10 BRIGITTE COLVER
Wholesale buyer

AGE: 19
FAVOURITE WEBSITE: www.lastminute.com
SHOE SIZE: 6
FIRST SITE THAT SPRINGS TO MIND? www.aol.com

_11 HEIDI HUNT
Shop assistant

AGE: 23
FAVOURITE WEBSITE: www.hotmail.com
SHOE SIZE: 5
FIRST SITE THAT SPRINGS TO MIND? www.lycos.com

_12 ESTHER CLEMENTINE
Shop assistant

AGE: 17
FAVOURITE WEBSITE: www.gadgetshop.com
SHOE SIZE: 6
FIRST SITE THAT SPRINGS TO MIND? www.breathe.com

_13 PUCK THE JESTER
Jester

AGE: 42
FAVOURITE WEBSITE: www.coventgardenlife.com
SHOE SIZE: 9
FIRST SITE THAT SPRINGS TO MIND? www.google.com

_14 JOHN THE DRUMMER
Drummer

AGE: 21
FAVOURITE WEBSITE: www.coventgardenlife.com
SHOE SIZE: 11
FIRST SITE THAT SPRINGS TO MIND? www.altavista.com

_15 KATE HUTCHINSON
Student

AGE: 18
FAVOURITE WEBSITE: www.breathe.com
SHOE SIZE: 3
FIRST SITE THAT SPRINGS TO MIND? www.currentbun.com

_16 CHRISTIAN STOBEL
Stylist and Model

AGE: 20
FAVOURITE WEBSITE: www.karinmodels.com
SHOE SIZE: 9
FIRST SITE THAT SPRINGS TO MIND? www.yahoo.com

_17 NICKY BULL
Human Resources manager

AGE: 26
FAVOURITE WEBSITE: www.smile.co.uk
SHOE SIZE: 5
FIRST SITE THAT SPRINGS TO MIND? www.bbc.co.uk/radio1

_18 JOSH SCHULTZ
Student

AGE: 19
FAVOURITE WEBSITE: www.yahoo.com
SHOE SIZE: 11
FIRST SITE THAT SPRINGS TO MIND? www.netscapeonline.com

_19 PAUL MCKWAN
Shop assistant

AGE: 27
FAVOURITE WEBSITE: www.blackstar.co.uk
SHOE SIZE: 10
FIRST SITE THAT SPRINGS TO MIND? www.shopsmart.com

_20 FRANK MAINWARING
Officer of the law

AGE: 24
FAVOURITE WEBSITE: www.hotmail.com
SHOE SIZE: 11
FIRST SITE THAT SPRINGS TO MIND? www.hotmail.com ■

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHY: **KATHERINE DOGGRELL**

Name:	Chris McGrail
Age:	26
Job Title:	Creative director
Company:	Kleber (www.kleber.net)
Example of work:	www.kleber.net/wipeout3, www.swayzak.co.uk www.thunderbugs.com
Fave project:	www.headheritage.co.uk
Goals for 2005:	"To be out of London in the country, working with music and graphics"

Music has always been cranked to full volume in the life of Chris McGrail, so it seemed a natural progression for his career to combine his love of audio with his love of art and graphics. After leaving his computing course at university and working at Obsolete, Chris set up Kleber with partner Dorian Moore. The pairing proved successful, and over the last three years the company has expanded, producing sites for the likes of Kylie Minogue, Julian Cope, Sony music europe, Leftfield and Jamiraquai, to name a few.

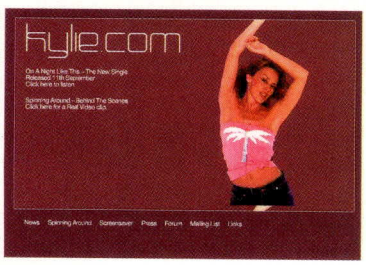
"There's been a constant flow of work thrown at us – we decided to specialise in music from day one," begins Chris. "Our music tastes mostly tie up with the sites. It helps if you're working on a project you can put everything into."

Kleber's first big break was the Kylie Minogue site, which it's currently working on a relaunch of. "It's put us under an incredible amount of pressure, because everyone loved the first site so much," laughs Chris. "Whatever we do, I don't think it'll live up to it."

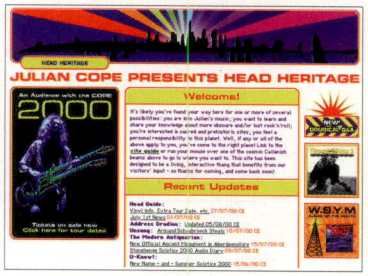
Like everyone at Kleber, Chris is a bit of an all-rounder: "There's no-one that's just a designer – everyone's involved at every stage," he says. "I can't get my head around separating stuff up – it's important to know how someone's going to interpret what you're doing." He's totally anti-*Dreamweaver*, but is a big *Flash* fan, "when it's used properly and integrated well".

As well as Kylie, Chris is also working on the relaunch of the Warp Records site, which Kleber has done in conjunction with the Designers Republic. "We've been working on that for a year, and a shop for DR, entirely in *Flash 4*." And here are Chris's top five Web hits...

TEXT: **CLARE LYDON**



Kleber's Kylie Minogue site is due for a revamp very soon – watch out for the Aussie starlet.



JULIAN COPE

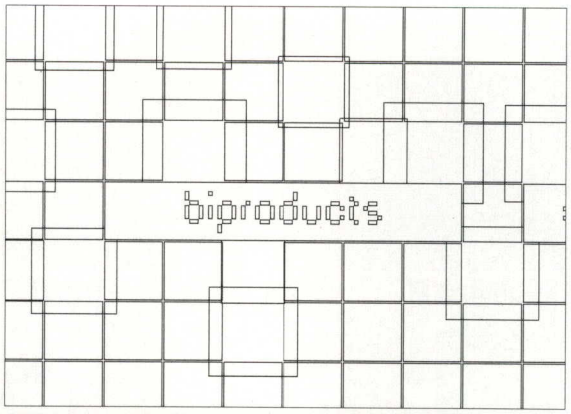
www.headheritage.co.uk

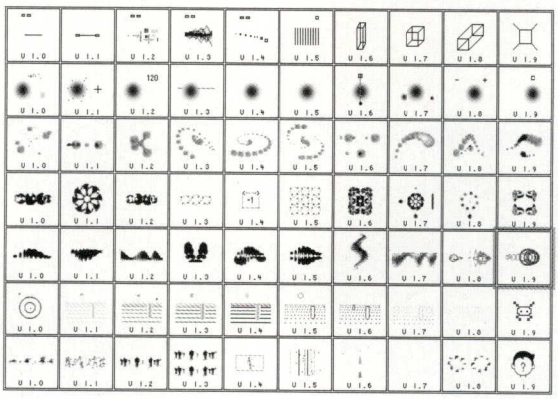
Rather cheekily, Chris's first choice is his own creation – the Julian Cope website. "It's very right on, and it's totally Julian Cope," he enthuses. "It's really community led too: there are forums for people to talk about ancient sites in Britain, lost rock'n'roll records of the 1960s and so on. People are contributing a lot of stuff, and Julian's interested in what people are doing."

Julian contributes regularly to the site, and Chris, having been a fan for nearly a decade, is thrilled to be involved.

"As a statement of intent, I think it's the pinnacle of an artist site – it's what all artist sites should be. It's not pushing any boundaries design-wise, but it's really thorough and there's so much content. It's a labour of love for me."

Bite **From pop superstar to new age hero, Julian Cope is multi-talented, as this website highlights.**





SQUARE ROOT OF ONE

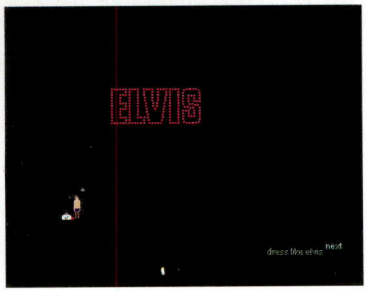
www.squarerootof-1.com

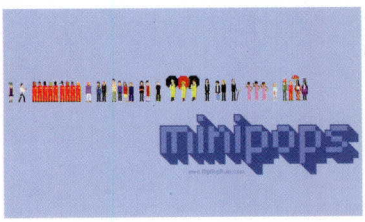
The creator of this site, James Tindall, worked for Kleber for six months recently on its Leftfield site. "He works in *Director* and is very talented," comments Chris. "Square Root Of One is a collection of sonic experiments, and it's very absorbing. If this was a real-world thing, it'd be arcadey, and you could charge 10p a go. You'd make a fortune!"

At the site, you can control the shapes and forms yourself, and the amount of content is astounding. Each combines varying shapes and motions, together with accompanying music – turn up your speakers and enjoy the ride.

"There's so much that's good in here, it's really difficult working out a favourite," adds Chris.

Bite **Shapes, lines, people and music. There are many things that make this site the unique experience it is.**





FLIPFLOPFLYIN

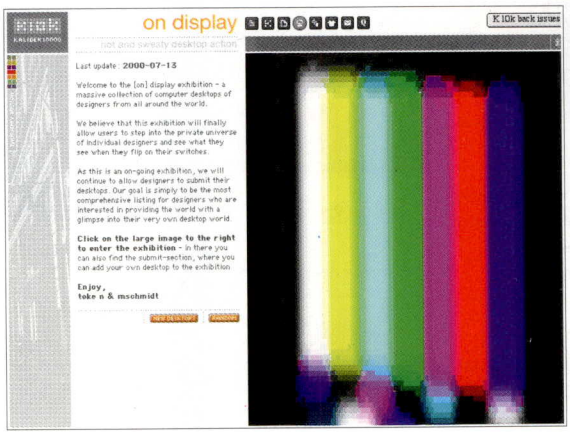
www.flipflopflyin.com

Easily winning the award of website of the month, Chris rates FlipFlopFlyin for the excellent minipops along with the other content, which he says "show you how much personality you can get into a small space. It's nice to come in once a month and check out what's happening. The bloke who does this is a bit of a star."

It's pixel art taking the gongs once more here, as Chris comments: "Again, it's stuff that looks like games – I think it'll be massively caned in the next few months."

When we asked Chris to name his favourite minipop, he couldn't single one out. "They're all brilliant. I can just imagine record sleeves with these on, and MTV picking it up. This guy could be a millionaire soon!"

Bite **Pixel fun at its best. Humour and content combine to make this site something of a modern day classic.**



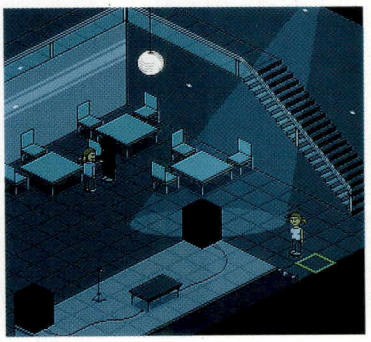
KALIBER 1000

www.k10k.net

"I've been looking at this for about nine months," says Chris of the designer favourite. "A while ago, there was something in *Creative Review* about the Warp Records site, and there was a comment from someone saying "Come on Chris, let's have a look at the website." I don't normally look at the magazine but somebody I hadn't seen for ages obviously thought I might be reading it, and I realised, oh my god, that's a message for me!"

Chris likes the independent nature of the site and thinks the content and tone are both spot-on. "There are lots of great links – it's wholesome."

Bite **The Designer's Lunchbox. Jam-packed, and guaranteed to leave you feeling full.**



MOBILE DISCO

www.mobilesdisco.com

Cute and clever, here's a site that highlights the pinnacle of pixel perfection. "It's a chatroom, and it's always full of Web designers," smiles Chris. "It's really cool and particularly evocative for anyone that had a computer in the 1980s."

Sign yourself in and you appear as a small character on screen. There's a bar where you can order drinks, then it's time to either chill with the other regulars, or navigate your way round the bar and through to the disco, where you can dance, while still drinking and chatting.

"I think it's fair to say that every Web agency that's seen this is working on something similar right now," stresses Chris. "If you had a Spectrum or a Commodore 64 when you were growing up, this is similar, but it's far better because it's in colour and looks so much better! It's a post-*Flash* thing. It's unnecessarily brilliant, and it's independent – there's no big company behind it, it's done out of love."

Bite **The disco is particularly entertaining, with strobe lights and spotlights. Put down your drink and go have a boogie.**

"If you had a Spectrum or a Commodore 64, Mobiles Disco is similar, but it's far better because it's in colour and looks so much better!"

Name:	Kate Sclater
Age:	23
Job Title:	Senior interactive designer
Company:	AMX Studios
Example of work:	Dazed & Confused (1998-99); http://users.breathemail.net/katesclater
Fave project:	The Woolwich iDTV & website www.woolwich.co.uk
Goals for 2005:	"I'd like to be designing and building my own house"

Right place, right time – that's how Kate Sclater modestly describes her break into Web design. After plugging four months of free creative energy into the *Dazed & Confused* website – then produced by AMX – the company won a job from Intel, and Kate was hired.

Nearly two years on, and Kate has scaled the heights to senior designer, most recently heading up the OpenPlan project for The Woolwich. The brief was to design its interactive TV-banking service on the Open platform, due to go live in August, and to redesign its website and produce a CD-ROM. And, despite having worked on such projects as Eurythmics and Mel C websites, along with ECDs for Skunk Anansie and Chris Isaak, Kate cites the Woolwich project as her favourite.

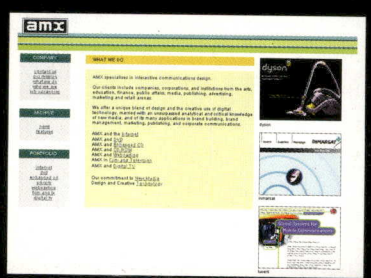
"I've learnt so much from it," she says. "I've had more client contact and we've had to think of brand awareness."

The Woolwich project has been taking up most of her time lately, although there's also been a project for Smirnoff Black and some work on a BT project.

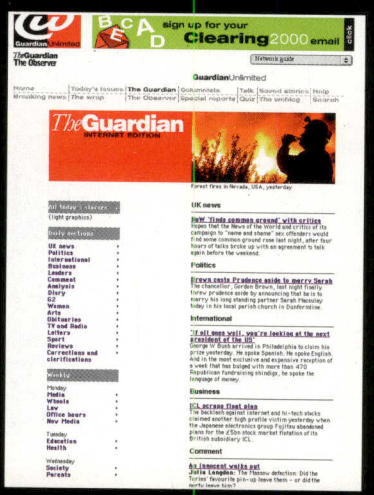
"With The Woolwich, Open is building the back-end, so you have to storyboard really thoroughly and put coordinates for everything to make sure they build it exactly as you envisaged – pixel perfect."

Kate works with *Photoshop* and *Illustrator* to design, along with *Dreamweaver* and *BBEdit* – but you won't find a lot of *Flash* in her work: "I'm not a major fan," she adds. "There's too much use of *Flash* out there that's pointless. I think DHTML is more interesting." And here's Kate's choice of URLs – decidedly *Flash*-lite...

TEXT: **CLARE LYDON**



Check out Kate's company on www.amxstudios.com



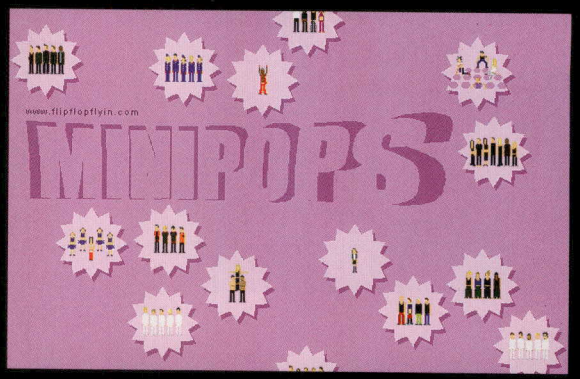
GUARDIAN UNLIMITED

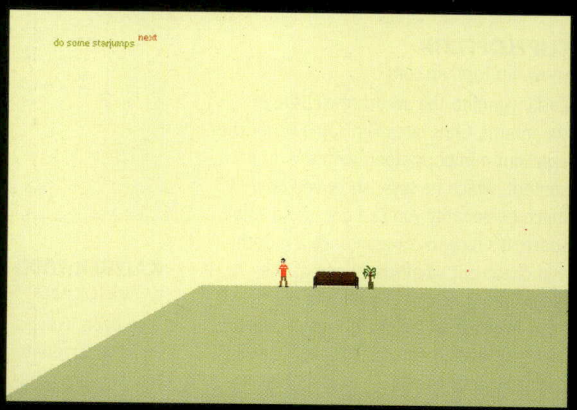
www.guardianunlimited.co.uk

When Kate needs a top-up of news and movie reviews, this is the site she heads to. Its mix of news, music, film, sport, plus a myriad of other topics means that it has a broad appeal too.

"I look at this site everyday – I go to filmunlimited mainly – and it's got some really good microsites on it. I just think it's really informative and that it has a clean design, like the newspaper. I really like this site for general stuff – I sometimes look at BBC Online for news too, but mainly Guardian Unlimited."

Bite **Clean design coupled with easy navigation and up-to-date content make this site a must-see.**





FLIPFLOPFLYIN

www.flipflopflyin.com

Taking the plaudits for a third time this issue, flipflopflyin.com is bubbling up from underground and has now become a modern-day classic for designers everywhere.

"I chose this just because it's fun," confirms Kate. "There's loads to look at, it's constantly updated and other people contribute too. For me, it's just like picking up your favourite book and looking at it every now and again." The cool mix of minipops, plus humorous skits and a mini museum of modern art (Minimoma, complete with Andy Warhol exhibits) puts this site ahead of the rest.

"My favourite minipops are Fawlty Towers, Björk and the All Saints – there's just hours of fun there. I also think the Minimoma is really cool."

Bite **If you're after a bit of light relief, check out the wide selection of minipops – guaranteed to raise a chuckle.**

PERFECT CHOICE

www.perfect.co.uk

Perfection is something that's not easy to achieve, and Kate Sclater cites this as a top website to browse so you can see what everyone else is up to.

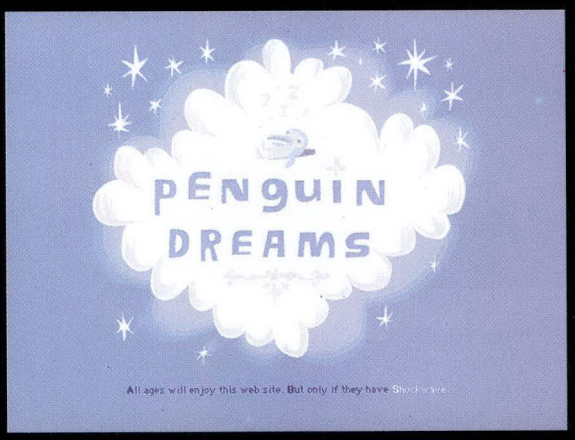
"A new site link is added everyday," confirms Kate. "It's really good because it means you get to see loads of sites and if I look at it once a week, say, it means I can quickly check out seven sites without having to try very hard – it's really good for a Friday afternoon surf!"

The site provides links to other Web resources, as well as to examples of outstanding site design – though perfect.co.uk itself wouldn't win any prizes on that front!

"It's really important to see lots of stuff that's out there just to know what you're up against, and to get inspiration. This site is a brilliant archive of links – everything is up there from when the guy started it a few years ago."

Bite **Looking for inspiration on a wet Tuesday afternoon? You can head down the boozer, but you'd be better off heading here.**

PENGUIN DREAMS
Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow.
Ice House
Won Hongo didn't know that!
...or this.
If you float like a bubble ooo
What is Chongo looking for... Make a snowflake and brighten up the night.
Change the size of your brush with the menu above, and if you go wrong just Start Over. Have fun.
Start Over



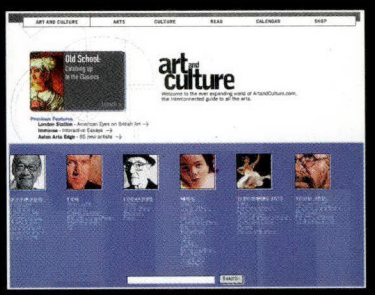
JOTTO

www.jotto.com

This site showcases the work of a San Francisco-based illustrator who makes childrens' books with his wife. Kate has been a fan for a while, and went to meet him at his studio while she was visiting the windy city earlier this year.

"It was cool to meet him after looking at his work for ages. I love his style and the colours he uses. I also like the site because it's basic and under-designed, with live text and HTML. There's a lot of his illustrations on it, and *Flash* and *Shockwave* bits. You can buy t-shirts and books (and I have). It's just a nice bit of fun." Visit here and see if you can resist ordering the 'Mr Lunch eating Pink Cake' t-shirt. Go on, we dare you.

Bite **Kids and bigger kids will love this – cute and clever characters, humorous design and t-shirts to match.**



ART AND CULTURE

www.artandculture.com

With aspirations to spread her designs into furniture and her own home, Kate lists this site as a terrific resource. "It's got clean design and great information," she says. "Everything I'm interested in is there – furniture design, architecture, film, graphic design, music. It's also got great navigation, which is done in *Flash* – you can collapse it all and expand it, and it's completely customisable. It's a good example of *Flash* used well.

"When you've chosen something, you then get a spider diagram at the top with the subject in the middle and links coming off it – useful URLs to find out about that subject. I think someone sent me the URL a while ago."

Bite **Art and culture snippets and more at your fingertips, delivered in a wholly navigable package.**

"IT'S IMPORTANT TO SEE LOTS OF STUFF OUT THERE, TO KNOW WHAT YOU'RE UP AGAINST AND TO GAIN INSPIRATION"

Name:	Rob Lowe & Dave Towers
Age:	29 (Rob), 27 (Dave)
Job Title:	Squadron leaders
Company:	Mathmos Graphic Utility Squadron
Example of work:	www.mathmos.com, www.mathmos-squadron.com www.designforliving.co.uk
Fave project:	www.mathmos.com
Goals for 2005:	"Building our design service (MGUS) and having it recognised as one of the best around"

Honest hearts, criminal minds: that's how the leaders of the Mathmos Graphic Utility Squadron (MGUS) describes themselves. But the new wing of the Mathmos group is proving it can fly with the big boys and is now attracting huge outside interest in its new purely Web-based design operation.

The co-pilots of the team are Rob Lowe and Dave Towers. Both graduates of Cleveland College, the dynamic duo are responsible for every piece of visual work at Mathmos – stationery, shop window, stuff for trade fairs – even the striking purple office walls. These days, however, print work is taking a back seat.

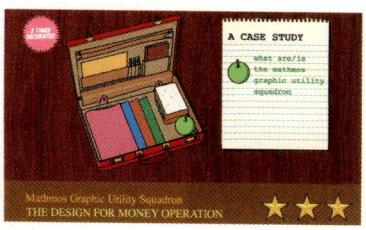
Before the days of the Squadron, Rob and Dave were plain 'ol land-based designers. They started working on the award-winning Mathmos site in 1997 and admit that the switch to the Web wasn't without the odd spot of turbulence.

"It took quite a while to get our heads around the whole Web thing, and then suddenly, it clicked. We realised that you can have your core site with the essential information, then you can have fun with the rest," says Dave.

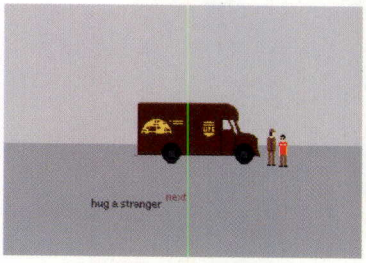
The pair stress that the fundamental ethos behind their work is getting across the necessary information in an entertaining way – they're also keen to make the user experience quick and easy. "At first we were worried about putting colour on the Web and making things too big, but then you realise there's a way of doing it. We use *Photoshop* and *Dreamweaver*, and make our own GIF animations."

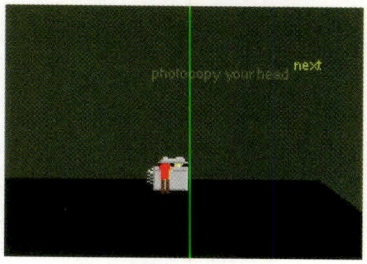
Colour is certainly a feature of their websites, which include a host of characters (Hank Tyler Toenails and Mathmos Man, to name but two), plus clever, interactive design combined with very tongue-in-cheek humour. Here's a few sites Rob and Dave have cleared for takeoff...

TEXT: **CLARE LYDON**


A CASE STUDY
what are/is the mathmos graphic utility squadron
Mathmos Graphic Utility Squadron
THE DESIGN FOR MONEY OPERATION

MGUS: It never flies home until a job is done.





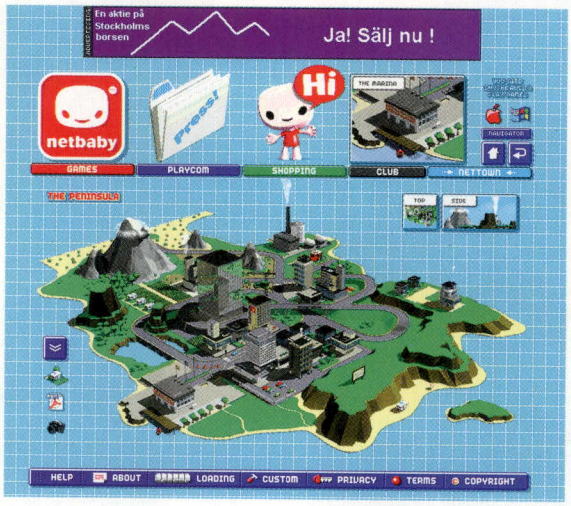
FLIPFLOPFLYIN

www.flipflopflyin.com

Rob offers: "This is just such a funny site. I love the Fun Fun Fun bit, with the Hug a Stranger – it's just pure humour, and it's really entertaining."

The duo discovered the site in *Creative Review*, and reckon the reason it's so popular is simply because it's so funny, and so vast that you need a few visits to see everything. "It's also good in that people can send in their stuff – it's approachable, anyone can do it. Our favourite is Harry Hill – even though it's a micropop someone sent in." Look out for the creator of this site, Craig, selecting his reviews soon.

Bite **From Abba to ZZ Top to the minimoma – check out the bite-size images here.**



NETBABYWORLD

www.netbabyworld.com

Similar in design and ethos to Eboy, this is another URL that keeps the pair coming back for more. "It's a games site which mainly uses *Flash*," says Rob. "The difference between this and a lot of sites is that the games are original and have brilliant sound."

"Graphically and content-wise, the site's great," agrees Dave. "There's a lot to it – you can customise your background with different colours and patterns. It's an example of *Flash* used in a good way – it's really crafted." The MGUS doesn't use a lot of *Flash* in its own work, although it believes there's a place for it: "There's a lot of good *Flash* stuff out there, but there's always a danger that if you overdo it, it'll end up looking like one of those 70s videos where you have that trail of heads effect – just think *Bohemian Rhapsody*!" says Dave.

Bite **Play games, create people and immerse yourself in the rich graphics and content available here.**

KYLIEULTRA

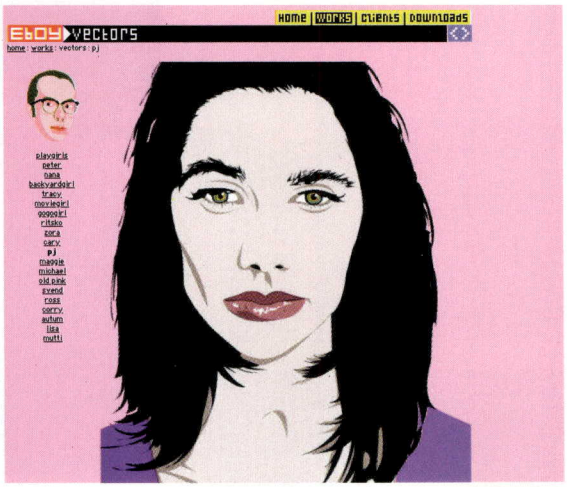
www.kylie.com/kylieultra.html

From Charleen in her oily overalls to sex-kitten Kylie, Miss Minogue has captured the imagination of the nation throughout her career. Rob says: "We selected this one purely for nostalgia reasons. The KylieUltra site was launched around the time we did our original Mathmos site, and this was the site that made us realise just what you can do with colour on the Web."

The site has all the usual artist info, but presents it in a way that ensures it's still eye-catching today.

Dave adds: "It has some great interaction in there too – you can dress Kylie in tracksuit bottoms with a fur coat and a kettle." The site was created by Chris McGrail's Kleber, featured on page 82.

Bite **From *Better The Devil You Know* to *Spinning Around*, Kylie's still a national institution.**



EBOY

www.eboy.com

Rob enthuses: "This is the site of another design agency, and we like it because it has great attention to detail and it's pixel art. It's definitely one of the best-looking sites on the Web. I love it."

The site is a showcase of the company's work, but also features news, downloads and a ton of GIFs. The duo add that the site has the same ethos as their own – you have to go in and investigate.

"We like it because it's simple, but well done," adds Dave. "It must have taken ages to do, and the quality is amazing. It's definitely a yardstick. The fonts are good too, they're just made for the Internet – as is the whole thing."

Bite **The yardstick for Internet graphics, this agency site is packed with content and is enough to make you drool.**

AMAZON

www.amazon.com

Chosen for both its design and content, Rob says that Amazon is the only site he uses to buy stuff. "You can find US records here, order them, get them sent over and it's cheaper than going down to your local recordshop! I also like the fact that you can call up biographies of loads of artists, listen to real audio clips and read and send in your own reviews of albums as well."

Dave continues: "The design is simple to use, especially considering the vastness of the topics covered. The navigation could be a nightmare but you always get what you want here, and it's uncluttered too."

Rob adds: "I also love it that you can giftwrap presents, write messages and send them to yourself..."

Bite **An ecommerce site that's a success – both in usability and style.**

"THE DESIGN OF AMAZON IS SIMPLE TO USE – IT COULD BE A NIGHTMARE, BUT YOU CAN ALWAYS GET WHAT YOU WANT"

Name:	Jim McNiven
Age:	30
Job title:	Chief monkey
Company:	Kerb New Media Agency
Example of work:	www.readingfestival.com
Fave project:	www.dubstar.com
Goals for 2005:	"Living in the French Alps spending every day snowboarding"

Money drove Jim McNiven to set up Kerb in 1996, or rather the lack of it. "I started running out of cash in my final year at uni. It was either limit my excessive lifestyle or get the cash to pay for it. I chose the second option and I stand by my decision," says the company's self-styled Chief Monkey.

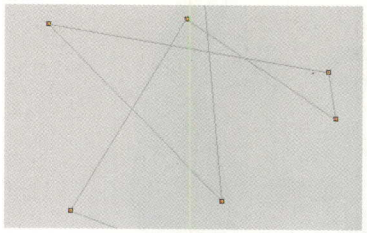
The university in question was Wolverhampton where Jim went to study Electronic Media after five years working in marketing. He reckons things have turned out nicely: "It took off from there, now there's 18 of us working for a list of kick-ass clients."

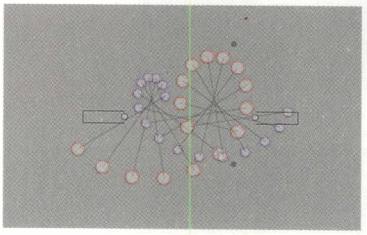
Jim admits that he loves new media: "It's the immediacy of the whole thing. You can have a ridiculous idea in the morning and by the evening the world can share it." Kerb is also partial to anything that moves. "We really specialise in illustration-based *Flash* work," says Jim. "But we do plenty of slick-looking stuff such as the CD-ROM bit of the last Louise single."

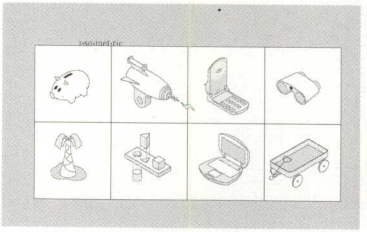
Despite the recent setback of having someone drive a car through the front of their Brighton offices (luckily no-one was hurt), the team have still had time to put the finishing touches to a site for those sugary popsters, Dubstar. "I'm a big fan of our Dubstar site because unusually for a band they had a big part to play in its creation. They specifically wanted it to be used as a medium with which they could communicate with the fans," Jim explains. "We created a slick-looking site that is wrapped around an easy-to-use, realtime, content-management system. They can update the site themselves, wherever they are in the world, whatever state of mind they are in." A word of caution, you could catch them tired and emotional, as Jim can testify: "They like a drink do Dubstar."

TEXT: **PETE WILTON**

Kerb's homepage showcases the firm's highly developed *Shockwave* skills.







UNCONTROL

www.uncontrol.com

"Some of our guys were at this year's FlashForward 2000 conference in New York where Uncontrol was nominated for an award and they came back raving about it," Jim tells us.

The site is populated by strange virtual creatures who respond to your mouse clicks. "My favourite part of this site has to be the spider. After a while it becomes distinctly disturbing." Leave the cursor still for any length of time and the artificial arachnid homes in on it leaving you feeling worryingly fly-like. Other highlights include a virtual cockroach, a computer that sprouts springy limbs and a section where you can paint pictures and submit them to the online gallery.

Jim opines: "This site is *Flash 4* used in a considered and effective way. The graphics are clean and simple, belying some complicated scripting lurking beneath. This sort of work will become more common with the release of *Flash 5*, but considering the constraints of *Flash 4* this is impressive indeed."

Bite **Don't let the system grey fool you, this is an interactive toy masquerading as a site. Enchanting and uniquely playful.**

Copyright ©1999-2000 Sami Kreta and Jarkko Salminen
sumea.com
RECENT
8 JUN >>>
Some press releases:
Nokia will support Java technology in mobile terminals
Single and multi-player games for new Motorola communication and computing handsets demonstrated at JavaOne
This means more playgrounds for us.
SUMEA 2
AN UNFINISHED OBJECT

SUMEA

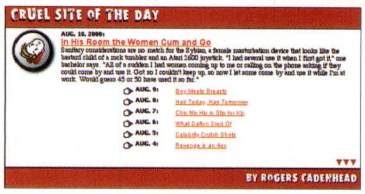
www.sumea.com

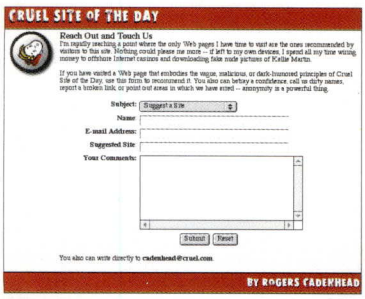
From the moment the background to Sumea's homepage loads up it's clear that what you're looking at is more interactive art than standard front-end.

"You'll need a decent graphics card and processor to check out the full effect of this site," Jim advises. "This is yet another Web project from Finland which combines cutting-edge Java programming with awesome 3D graphics." Highlights include an animation of a swimming turtle that rotates along several axes as you move the pointer around, and a fascinating cyber embryo creation that is illuminated by some classy lighting effects. It's not just visually stimulating, the music is strangely hypnotic and soothing, and brilliantly suited to each piece.

"Environments are rendered in realtime including particle systems, depth of field and even transparency," says Jim with some admiration. "This site is a prime example of the future of Web development, namely the perfect fusion of hot graphics and awesome programming skills."

Bite **If you want to see what Java is really capable of, then go to this site right now. Elegant, beautiful and full of animated goodness.**





CRUEL SITE OF THE DAY

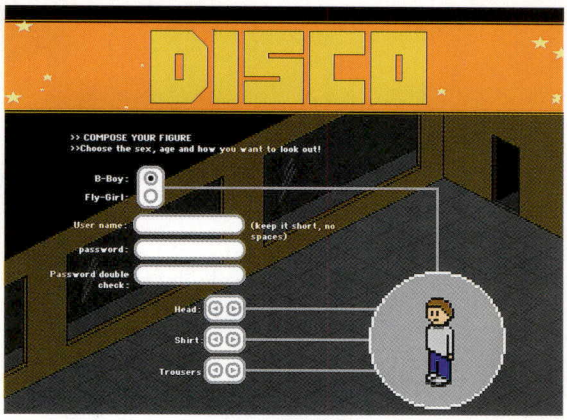
www.cruel.com

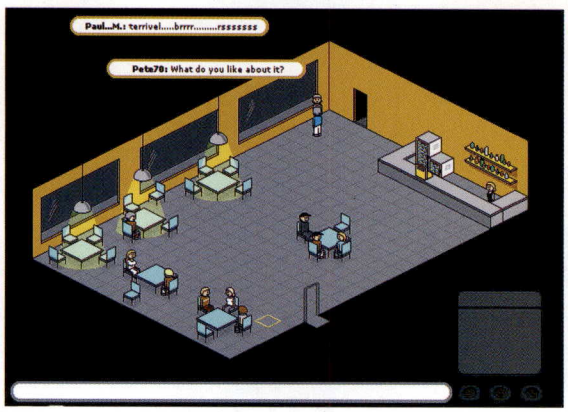
While other pages may hang on to a certain sense of decorum, cruel.com is happy to highlight the hate that other sites do not. Essentially just a collection of links to intentionally and unintentionally cruel sites, Jim believes it provides a valuable service.

"This is not a design masterpiece, it's not even close. There's no real content to speak of and there's nothing at all clever about the programming it sits on," Jim states. "However, what this site contains is a list of some of the funniest and plainly wrong sites on the Internet. If you are the sort of person who loves to send people links to twisted websites then look no further, all the resources you ever needed are here in a clean, easy-to-navigate site."

Avoid it and you'll miss laser-assisted back-hair removal, hair-raising date stories and a site featuring stars on crutches. Jim adds: "Without this site, I'd never have read the inane ramblings of a woman who is convinced she is being persecuted by people unknown or the transcript of people having cybersex badly."

Bite **Discover just how politically correct you really are by seeing how much these cruel sites will make you squirm.**





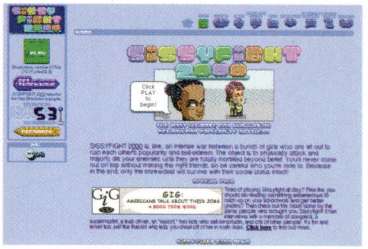
MOBILES DISCO

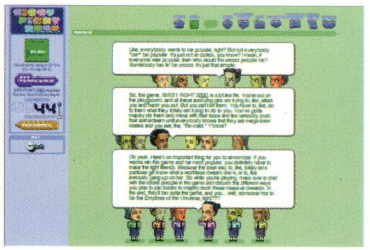
www.mobilesdisco.com

Ever wanted to be someone else for a while? Well now you can, thanks to Mobiles Disco, the classiest virtual night spot around. Jim says: "It's the ultimate chat site. A virtual Finnish night club has got to be a better idea than a real one, so this interactive *Shockwave*-driven chat site is the perfect answer."

Create your own identity right down to trendy trews and slick shirts and then spout meaningless nonsense at perfect strangers who probably don't speak your mother tongue anyway. "The style is that typical Scandinavian style that doesn't bother with anti-aliasing, similar to netbabyworld or SissyFighter," Jim comments. "It's the best avatar-based chat site you'll see. So if you've got no real friends, get yourself down there, wander around, sit down with a group of strangers, dance and even go and buy yourself a cool glass of Olut." We ordered ourselves a glass of Olut and it was freezing. Well, virtually.

Bite **Visit a country with even worse weather than the UK and meet our friends from the Norse – Mr Hakkinen would approve.**





SISSYFIGHT 2000

www.sissyfight.com

If you're tired of chat sites and predictable online games, then SissyFighter will come, not so much as a breath of fresh air, but as a wet raspberry in the ear.

"While it looks really cool and cutesy, it's completely twisted," says Jim.

The most difficult part of joining SissyFighter is finding a cool nickname for your alter ego that hasn't already been taken. "It's a server-based *Shockwave* game that puts you in control of a customisable seven year-old girl," explains Jim. "The aim of the game is to manipulate your competitors into bullying, scratching and teasing each other until they cry." Your efforts are judged, and any breaches of SissyFighter etiquette will be dealt with severely.

If you want, you can indulge in some verbal foreplay before the grabbing, tale telling and lolly-licking commences. But, Jim warns: "This is the most addictive game online, so don't get started unless you have plenty of time to kill. You get so caught up in the whole thing that you become the character, and typing the words 'I'm not your friend because you smell of pooh' seems second nature. Or maybe that's just me."

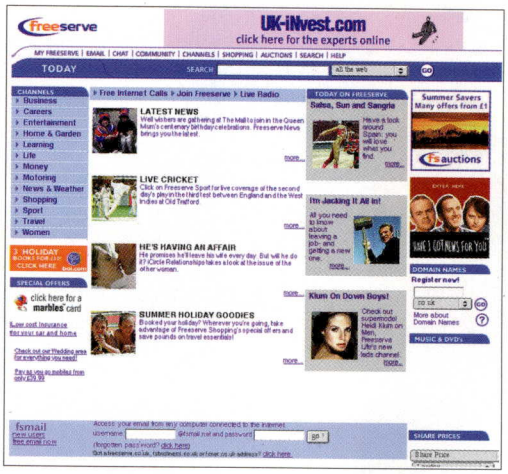
Bite **A mini theatre of cruelty in game form, SissyFighter is the *Shockwave* equivalent of *Big Brother*.**

"IF YOU'RE TIRED OF CHAT SITES AND PREDICTABLE ONLINE GAMES THEN SISSYFIGHTER WILL COME, NOT SO MUCH AS A BREATH OF FRESH AIR, BUT AS A WET RASPBERRY IN THE EAR"

CAF
E T ACCES S

i'm free

IT MAY NOT COST ITS USERS ANYTHING BUT FREESERVE STILL NEEDS TO LOOK PROFICIENT. WE ASKED THREE DESIGNERS TO TUCK INTO THE UK'S LEADING PORTAL AND TELL US HOW IT COULD IMPROVE. HERE'S WHAT THEY SAID...



Freeserve's homepage is clear and easy to use. It's only later that the navigation gets a bit confusing.

NAME: BEN GHOST
Occupation: Senior designer, Design Net
Favourite sites:
www.linkdup.com
"A must in any designer's favourites. Effectively designed site reviewing and rating all the latest 'cool' sites."
http://i.am/c*ted**
[You need to put in the actual letters. No prizes for guessing what they are!]
"Grey is the way. No need to give over a ton of space to the content, so easy to navigate and downloads very fast."

NAME: SIMON SCOTT
Occupation: Creative director, Noomedia
Favourite sites:
www.pixelpressure.com
"A design and music forum, nice *Flash* and current DJ charts. Changes every month."
www.platform.net
"'The digital source for urban survival' is a slightly shit strap-line but it's the best portal I know. Great links too."

NAME: PAUL CLEGHORN
Occupation: Senior designer, Razorfish
Favourite sites:
www.news.com
"I've been reading this source of general tech news for about three or four years now. It's grown organically with the Web and with me."
www.sputnikworld.com
"Good for some of the old ultra-violence. They're back, and they don't wear fishnets over their heads anymore."

Perhaps the best known of the UK's free Internet service sites, Freeserve dishes up a constant stream of information from news and entertainment to ecommerce services. It's also got enough lifestyle features to keep the pages of *Cosmo* packed for a fair few months. Throw in free Internet access and an online delivery discount and you must be on to a winner. We let three designers cast their votes.

What are your first impressions of freeserve.com?

BEN: It was a lot clearer than I thought it would be. A lot of these sites tend to be too busy but you could see Freeserve's features quite easily.

SIMON: There is a hell of a lot of content there but it doesn't look like it's jumbled. From a design point of view it's an adequate portal. It's pretty clear, and when you get into the site everything's colour coded. Definitely one of the better ones.

PAUL: The content's good but some parts are confusing. It's got this bunch of buttons, the Forum and the Site, that I had no idea what they were for.

BEN: Yeah. I really like icons and stuff but those ones are so obscure that I didn't have a clue what they were there for. I moused over them to see if it would tell me, but it didn't do anything at all.

PAUL: The news stories bug me. You can't click on the photo or the text, there's just that thing that says 'more'.

BEN: That's true. I kept trying to click on the pictures and nothing's happening. It's a bit of a basic thing which they should try and develop.

SIMON: I think it's pretty sound really. The amount of information there means it's going to be difficult to design. It's also a constant server site which is dynamically updated all the time, so it's got to be really flexible and I think it is.

What's its best feature?

BEN: From a design point of view, I think they've used colours quite well. The way that it's broken into different channels that are colour-coded I thought was quite nice.

SIMON: I read a thing recently about somebody slating colour-coding and I thought 'No' – sometimes that's your only hope. You've got to use colour-coding and I think it works well here.

PAUL: Yeah. It's nice and unchallenging. I'd guess that most of their users are new so this format wouldn't frighten them.

BEN: It's not intimidating for new users but at the same time there's a few points where, if you click through, you think 'Shit, how do I get back?' Because they've broken it into channels, you can go to a section and without even realising it you're in a different website with a completely different URL. ➤

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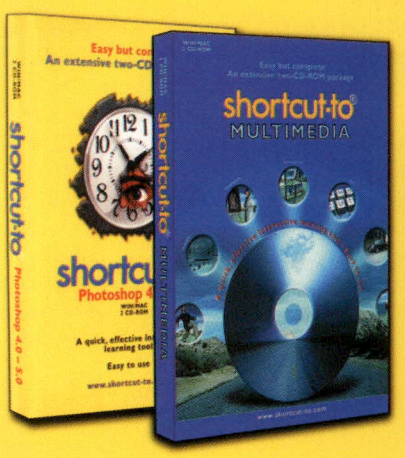

★★★★★ vnunet.com

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Josse Bilson, **Editor Computer Arts**

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SIMON: Pointing them to different URLs is a bad idea for new users.
BEN: I've got a feeling that Freeserve has its bit, and that all the subsections are independently run and it's up to them to make it look how they want it to look. I went to the auction section and it's got the Freeserve logo in the corner, but then the rest of it is all run by another bunch of guys and they obviously don't have a designer.
SIMON: Yeah. That's just to keep their brand identity going all the way through but it is misleading.
PAUL: I found a cheap telly though.
BEN: They've got some good stuff on their auction. I actually signed on to that and I also got a free one-month trial to get email on my phone. There's pretty much everything you want. They give you loads of free space and as many email accounts as you can handle.

So the content's quite useful?
BEN: Oh yeah. I think they've got some really nice things. I can see how it holds interest for virtually anyone. They cover all aspects. There's a big women's section that has all the latest issues, or whatever. It's certainly better than Excite, which looks a right mess. There's too much going on and there's hardly any pictures.
PAUL: Yeah, that's awful. I think a good thing about Freeserve is that it doesn't push you into personalising it which was the big thing about a year ago. I've noticed they've got my.freeserve but they don't hammer it home. At least Freeserve works.
BEN: It works fine on the Mac for a start. A lot of stuff isn't Mac friendly at all. It's like 'Fuck the Macs'.
SIMON: Yeah, Internet banks are crap for that. Egg was bad for a while and Smile doesn't even support Macs.

Where does Freeserve fall down?
BEN: It's a complete nightmare trying to design something like this and make it different. But at the end of the day, this does look like everything else.
PAUL: Yeah. Left-hand nav, logo top left, the little boxes down one side.
SIMON: And the pulldown menu in the bar across the top.
BEN: Although the content's a plus point, they need to do something about how it's conveyed. They thought about the initial presentation with the homepage, but once you go from there they whack you with all this information. There's so much text and it's all scrolling. You're like 'Fuck that'. I couldn't be bothered.
SIMON: You can't have it scrolling for miles with all that content going on one page. The site map is a classic example of that. It should be the clearest thing to follow on there, but it goes on and on for ages. There's much more efficient ways of doing it than that.
PAUL: I think they've also missed an opportunity here. Everyone using this will have version-4 browsers but Freeserve doesn't use any of that technology, which is a bit odd.

You mentioned the navigation could be a bit confusing...
BEN: Yeah, it's quite easy to get so far into the site and find you can't get back. When you're designing a site, you always need to be able to access it anywhere, so you need consistency in the navigation. A tree of pages where you know where you are and which will always take you back would be a start.
PAUL: It takes several clicks to get to anything meaningful which drags on a bit, and getting back is always a bit of a chore.
SIMON: I also don't like the pop-up window at the start advertising Marbles. It's a bit strong, especially when there's another Marbles ad on the page itself. There are also a few really crap ads down the side. I know they're a necessity, but they still used up quite a lot of space.

What are your overall opinions?
SIMON: I've never seen a free site's front-end. In the early days when I used free browsers I'd just bung out the homepage and put my own in there. I'd never look around those things, but if you want engaging content I think Freeserve has done its job brilliantly.
BEN: If you're in the industry then you never normally go near these sorts of sites. On the odd occasion I have done, this one stands out above the rest. It serves its purpose, it's easy to use and it looks nice for what it does.
PAUL: They could also be a bit more ambitious perhaps. They could have done a lot of interactive things rather than just the standard template. They're the people introducing a lot of new users to the Internet so they're in a great position to introduce new ideas. It's not as terrible as I thought it would be though. Give it a six out of ten.

THE RESPONSE
Stratis Scleparis, Chief Technology Officer at Freeserve comments:
"The Freeserve portal was redesigned earlier this year. The channel colours make each channel instantly recognisable, and the addition of the illustration (or 'watermark') on the header also differentiates each section.

"Navigation has already evolved from our initial designs, and we're now introducing nested menus to overcome the issues with adding sub menus. This will become consistent throughout the portal in the coming weeks.

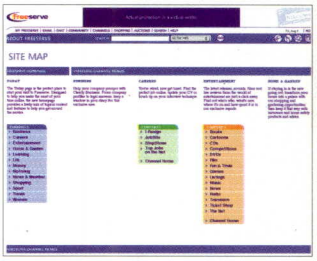
"Another aspect of the redesign was to restructure the pages. The introduction of editorial content has, in some places, resulted in scrolling, which is being addressed. However, we feel that this is preferable to pages with no background at all – a feeling of order and calm was needed, which the previous design lacked at times.

"Channels such as FS auctions are our 'core brand extensions'. They run in association with Freeserve, but are not designed by us. This is why they differ from the main portal. While we understand the importance of retaining an identity for these channels, we will be working on a broader portal-design strategy and defining a more consistent approach.

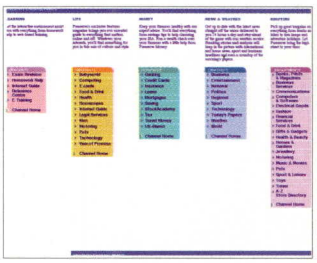
"We are producing tighter design guidelines for partners in order to ensure that users can easily return to the Freeserve portal. Current additions to navigation include clickable photos with news stories on channel pages, and we are actively creating easier access to information within the editorial." ■

TEXT: **KEITH DREW**/ PHOTOGRAPHY: **NICK WILSON**
WITH THANKS TO CYBERIA CAFE AT 39 WHITFIELD STREET, LONDON. CALL 020 7681 4224

A plus point of the Freeserve site is the sheer amount of content.



The site map also has a lot of info. But the scrolling goes on...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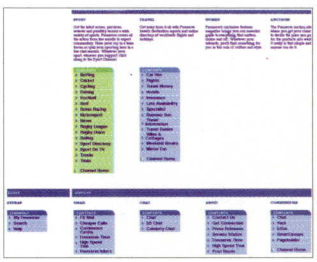
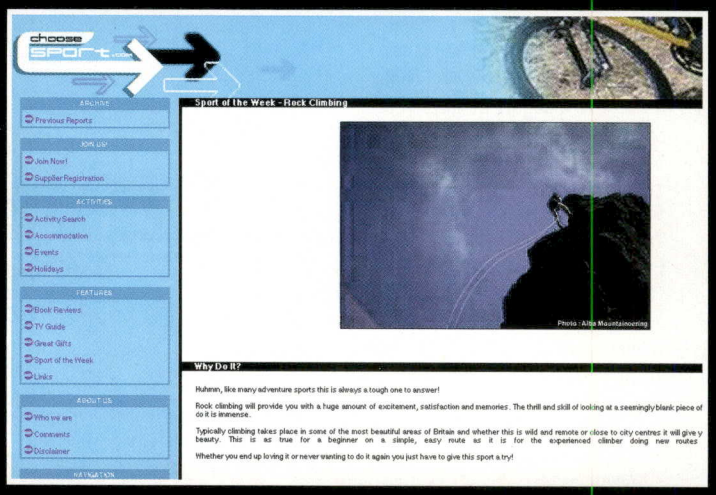

...and on.

But the auction page has plenty of good deals to snap up, if not the best design.



hit miss or_maybe

PUBLIC TRANSPORT NOT DANGEROUS ENOUGH FOR YOU? THREE DESIGNERS BRAVE THE WORLD OF ADVENTURE SPORTS AT WWW.CHOOSESPORT.COM

Ten years ago you thought you were having a riotous holiday if you tried the local's take on home brew. Even sticking your hand into a rock pool was deemed a bit sketchy.

Now it seems we're not happy unless we spend a fortnight plunging through, under or into the nearest pointy rock formation with only a springy rope for protection. Sitting is out and 'adventures' of the like that would turn the Famous Five prematurely grey are in.

Designed in-house by Mike Lawrence and Paul Shade, www.choosesport.com touts itself as a portal for the kind of jaunts that have their own insurance bracket. Members can enjoy access to reviews, new sports (suicide serving suggestions) and a search engine that will lead you to merchants of death.

Cre@teOnline packed its cagoule and went out to test the waters...

Name: Peter Beddow
Company: Quokka Sports
Position: Creative director
History: "I evolved from print to CD-ROM to Web"
Latest project: A site for Compaq, promoting its sponsorship of the BMW Williams F1 team
Finest project: A site for Sprint Drums, a high-bandwidth remote collaboration film editing suite

PETER BEGINS: "My initial impression of the site is that it's quite utilitarian, not necessarily a bad thing. It could use a bit of a sheen, a design style with character, something the brand can own.

"They could do a better job proclaiming the site benefits on the homepage. The 'What's on the site' box does this, but it could be more concise. I'm unsure about the prominence of the photo of the week – that's valuable real estate. I like the content boxes on the right, but a bit of design flavour would be nice. Some excitement would help. Adventure sport is a visually rich subject and this should be leveraged. However, the text and font size work. My only complaint is about the use of justified text in some instances."

And the logo? "The design is fine. Logos are very personal: it's a bit heavy on the technology feel and light on sport. The arrow could perhaps be more subtle. It could also lose the animation.

"The search engine is misleading. It threw me off when I went to the gifts section and moved into the same search page used for accommodation. This gives the impression the data isn't really specific, even if it is. To build the community aspect, you should put a bit of yourself into it – to show you've done some legwork, rather than giving the user a good search engine."

Peter concludes: "The global navigation is fine and the selections are clear. Although I think the navigation through the search process could be better defined or clarified. Also, the site needs a visual voice. On a personal level, I probably wouldn't use the site as I'm not a huge adventure sport junkie. Even if I were, I think it needs a little work before I would become a regular user."

Best design feature: "Bike in the top bar"
Worst design feature: "Arrows and orange rollover text highlight in global navigation"
Verdict: "Miss, but salvageable"

Name: Mathias Hellquist
Company: Halogen
Position: Interactive developer
History: Moved into Internet design after a career in print, having noticed that the Web was in need of decent sites
Latest project: www.halogen.com
Finest project: www.wallpaper.com

Name: Rupert Dixon
Company: Traffic Interactive Ltd
Position: Designer
History: www.traffic.co.uk
Latest project: Classified
Finest project: Moved from print design to the Internet in search of new challenges

MATHIAS COMMENTS: "At first sight, the thing that struck me was the logo – it's ugly and hard to read. What are the extra arrows doing there? I'd lose them, and the .com from it too. There's a badly compressed image up in the top corner, with a 'what-is-this-about-anyway' feeling, and dry navigation. Designwise, I think the site lacks a solid profile. It doesn't feel sporty and on-the-edge daring. It's not an adrenaline-kick.

"I had to stare at the first page for a while just to figure out what it was I was looking at, and what the site wanted from me. The navigation of the site is boring, although it doesn't have to be bells and whistles to have a good navigation. I would probably structure the whole site in another way."

Any pluses? "The functionality of the search engine is quite good. I like the map where I can click to go to places, and I like the fact that it's suggesting activities or accommodation depending on what you click on. Although, I did think I could see clues to buy stuff, but I couldn't, which was strange."

Mathias concludes: "As for concept, I'd guess it's quite good as a service for people interested in outdoor sports. However, I don't rate the text – it's not informative enough. I wouldn't use the site, but maybe that's because I don't do outdoor sports, right? It needs to feel on-the-edge and daring, to appeal to the target group."

Best design feature: "Users' pictures, if they keep up that quality"
Worst design feature: "Logo, and the image up at top"
Verdict: "Miss"

RUPERT SAYS: "The site seems very informative, but the designers have managed to keep it comprehensive at the same time, which is useful. The home page is very cluttered, though, and there's too much going on with the text all around the main image as well as menu tables down the side. I don't think there's that much need for explanation with a site like this, which is fairly obvious. The presentation of text is messy too, and I don't like proportional tables with copy. The logo's not bad, for 3.4KB; it's aimed at a young, unsophisticated audience.

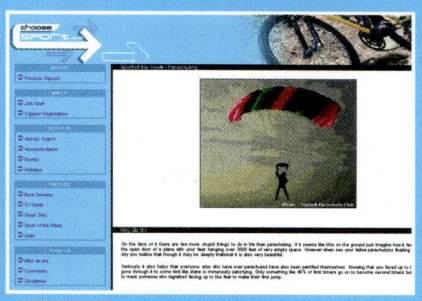
"I think the use of users' own photos at the front is good idea too. It's always good to emphasise the community aspect if you can, but it's a waste of 40K and would be annoying for a home user to wait to download. There's no explanation either, which makes it seem a bit random. However, the concept of building a community is good and aimed at the right people. I would probably use the site – in fact, I've used a similar site."

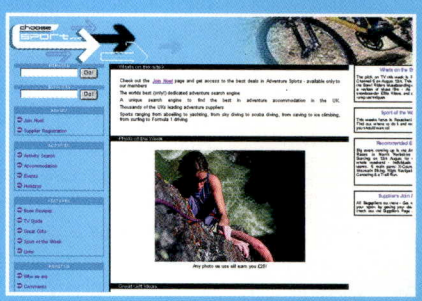
Rupert adds: "The search engine is good – it all seems accurate, although I don't like limiting choice by having a drop-down menu on searches. The navigation wasn't intrinsically useable and doesn't pull you into the path. It could be made more interesting."

Overall? "I don't think this sort of site is the future of websites. However, it's certainly on the right lines, with registration and membership being a useful element for the success of the site."

Best design feature: "The search engine"
Worst design feature: "The proportional tables and the navigational structure"
Verdict: "Maybe – good idea, not keen on execution" ■

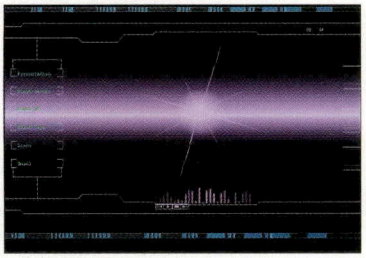
TEXT: **KATHERINE DOGGRELL**



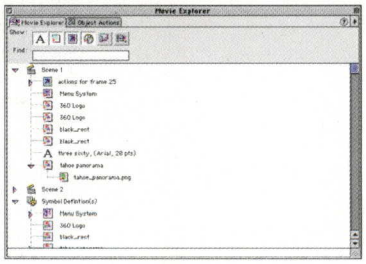


Choosesport's layout and menu are useful enough, but the site needs a jolt of adrenaline to kick its sporty identity into high gear.

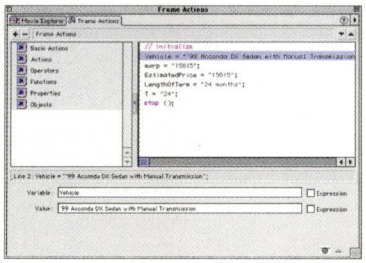
Macromedia's development of ActionScript was partially in response to the uses games coders were making of *Flash 4*. The new syntax and tools makes scripting more amenable to experienced programmers.



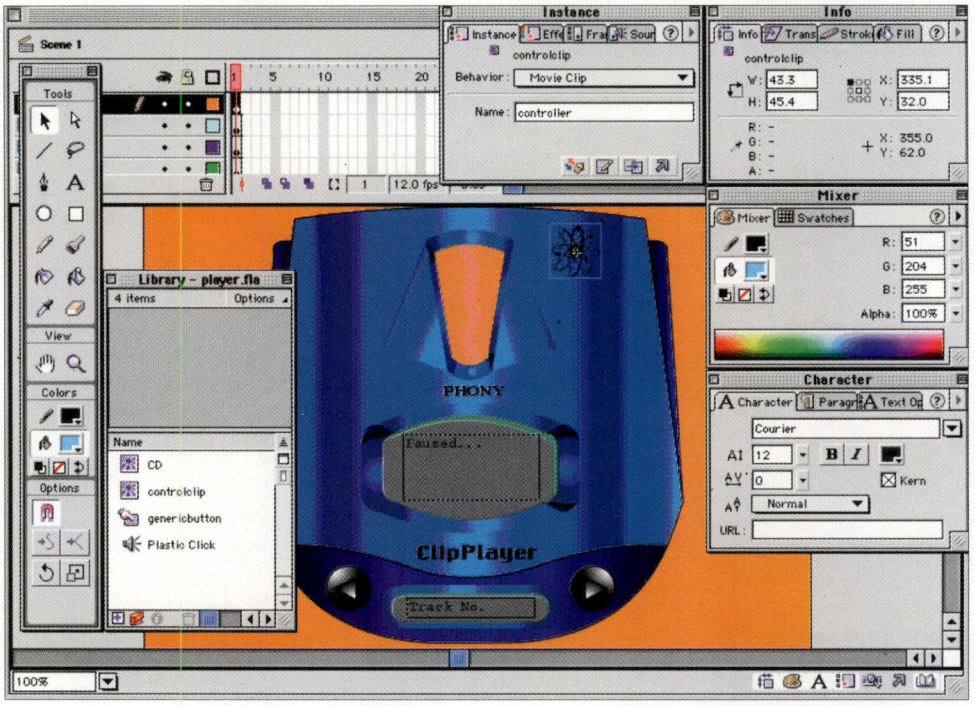
Flash splash pages and navigation are becoming common-place. *Flash 5* makes the object-oriented metaphor of ActionScripting explicit, transforming the package into a fully fledged programming tool.



The Movie Explorer changes the way you access and work with the contents of *Flash* movies. You can find and edit any element quickly and easily.



Enhancements to the scripting language include new distinct commands to deal with importing and using variables, alongside Actions that control sounds, detect collisions and measure object boundaries.



With a major overhaul of the interface and scripting capabilities, *Flash 5* renders all pretenders to its crown redundant.

FLASH 5

WITH COMPETITION FROM *LIVEMOTION* AND *XARA X*, CAN MACROMEDIA'S *FLASH 5* CONTINUE TO HOLD ON TO ITS CROWN? OUR REVIEW OF THE BETA VERSION SUGGESTS IT CAN – AND THEN SOME...

Flash 4 started a quiet revolution among hardcore Web designers. Like so many cool yet 'difficult' developments, the real work has been happening underground. While corporate Web design churns out an endless procession of tween-happy splash pages, the kids have been using ActionScript variables to model real-world physics and build database-connected dynamic applications with PHP3 and a couple of bits of hairy string. The fact that you weren't supposed to be able to do this didn't deter them; neither did *Flash's* apparently linear structure. Clever designers found out how to subvert *Flash 4's* structure using movie clips as modular function libraries, swapping them in and out with the Load Movie command.

Starting life as a quirky package for embedding vector animation's into HTML, *Flash 5* is now capable of creating intelligent, interactive Web applications that communicate and combine with HTML, XML, JavaScript; and, by extension, just about any middleware application you can think of. *Flash 5* has been supercharged into the Web's best client side authoring tool, and it's done this by making the new version a whole lot easier to use the 'wrong' way.

PANEL GAMES

Flash 5's enhancements are right there on screen the moment you start the package: the interface has had a major overhaul that brings it into line with the look and feel of other recent releases. Aside from these aesthetic tweaks, you'll notice several new palettes on screen, although the functions they display may seem familiar. This is because *Flash 5* has done away with dialogue boxes more or less completely and replaced them with a series of in-program panels. Need to tweak frame properties? The panel is right there in view. Want to change an object's colour? A new mixer panel enables you to do it without having to take a sideways step into a colour dialogue.

Across the board, properties and parameters dialogues have been separated into panels – including a small collection of tabbed text panels that work in a similar way to *FreeHand*. Although this could all get very messy very quickly, the damage is minimised by enabling you to save and name your own panel layouts. This means you can have a different layout for animation, one for scripting and another just for drawing. A new feature that makes it easier to customise and create keyboard shortcuts also makes it easy to access any of these saved layouts.

INTREPID EXPLORER

Among the familiar functions in the new panels are some entirely new features, too. The most striking is Movie Explorer – a tool that accelerates workflow through larger projects immeasurably. *Flash* has always had a hidden object hierarchy composed of movies, then scenes, then clips and symbols (which in turn can be on different movie levels and contain further scripts and symbols). The Movie Explorer makes this visually explicit by showing the contents of your movie in a hierarchical tree, similar to *Explorer* or the List view in the Mac Finder.

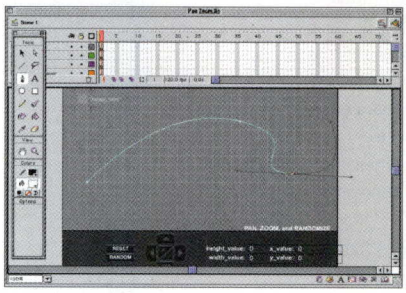
Locating specific elements within a movie – say a clip that contains a vital script or a specific instance of a symbol – is now just a matter of drilling down through the list instead of hunting through various timelines. The job is made even easier by a search window and file filters, similar to those introduced into the Library with *Flash 4*.

Although in one sense this can be viewed as a simple workflow enhancement, in another it endorses what has until now been a non-standard way of working. The timeline in *Flash* has imposed a linear model of production on the package from the start, but the introduction of *Flash* Movie Clips began a trend among developers towards a more object-oriented approach to authoring with the package. The Movie Explorer, by breaking down movies into their components, makes this way of working far easier, while retaining all the traditional tools beloved of those who use *Flash* for more simple purposes.

BÉZIER TOOLS

Flash's natural vector drawing tools have divided users for a long time. The non-standard toolset was great for creating bold, colourful illustrations, but fell down when more subtlety was required. Macromedia has finally updated the drawing tools to include a standard pen tool and Bézier editing capabilities. The original drawing tools are still present, and the transition is as seamless as possible. If you're used to working in _Illustrator_ or _FreeHand_, you should applaud this – you now have the control of line drawing found in other vector illustration packages.

To underline this, _Flash 5_ also features better import tools for _FreeHand_, maintaining features like transparency and layers. An import dialogue enables you to map pages to layers or scenes too, so you can select exactly which pages to use. Similarly, you can map layers to _Flash_ layers or to keyframes. In the latter case, this enables you to produce onion-skinned frame-by-frame animations in the drawing environment of _FreeHand_, and import them to _Flash_ for post-production.



***Flash's* natural drawing style isn't up everyone's street. For more precision and control, *Flash* now has Bézier editing tools.**

MAJOR FEATURES

- Vector animation for the Web and other applications
- Improved scripting and interaction
- Revamped interface with reduced dialogues
- *FreeHand 9* and *Fireworks 3* import
- Customisable keyboard shortcuts
- Smart Clips for reusable code snippets
- HTML text formatting
- Hierarchical Movie Explorer
- XML data transfer within
- ActionScripts
- Script import and export
- Bézier drawing tools

DETAILS

PRICE: £259 (upgrade £99)
CONTACT:
www.macromedia.com/flash/
PLATFORM: PC/Mac
REQUIREMENTS: 133MHz Pentium/PowerMac (Pentium III/G4 rec); Win 95/98/200/NT 4/2K/OS 8.5+ (OS 9 rec); 32MB RAM (64MB RAM rec); 40MB HD

SCRIPT KIDDIES

While these interface enhancements are impressive, the improvement with the true Wow! factor is under the bonnet. ActionScripting has been revised from the ground up to be compliant with the syntax structure of ECMA standard JavaScript. If you've already been dabbling in ActionScript, the transition won't be as difficult as it first sounds – the tools available retain enough similarity to their *Flash 4* equivalents for a smooth hand-over. And if you're familiar with JavaScript (or even *Director* Lingo), you'll find the changes liberating. At last, we have an interactive scripting language with a standard structure for client-side Web application development. The fact that it's part of one of the best interface development tools for the Net is almost incidental.

A revamped Script Editor accompanies the updates to ActionScript, and has two available modes: Normal and Expert. In Normal mode, you can work on ActionScripts more or less as before. Actions can be added command by command using a drop-down menu, and this is accompanied by a second hierarchical view of available commands. A window to the left shows the current script, colour-coded to ease editing. You can now also export scripts as plain text, or imported in ASCII format. The bottom panel, which disappears in Expert mode, is used to adjust parameters when choices are available.

Newcomers may be daunted by the number of available tools in *Flash 5*, while previous users may need to acclimatise to a different way of doing things. This revision of *Flash* is radical, and it won't please everyone at first. Still, there's enough left of the old way of doing things to smooth the transition for true believers. If you're serious about doing great things on the Web and are prepared to put in the effort to learn something a little more difficult than animating along motion paths, on this evidence *Flash 5* is a must-have package. ➤

TEXT: **KARL HODGE**

"THIS REVISION IS RADICAL, BUT THERE'S ENOUGH OF THE OLD TO SMOOTH THE TRANSITION"

THE DESIGNERS' VIEW

WE GAVE FOUR TOP WEB DESIGNERS THE *FLASH 5* BETA, AND ASKED THEM TO NAME THEIR HIGHLIGHTS AND REMAINING NIGGLES. IT MAKES FOR SOME INTERESTING READING

_01

NAME: Antony Webster
TITLE: Art director
COMPANY: Proxicom

"*Flash* is increasingly becoming an integral part of the client projects we're delivering, and I think the highlight of this release is documentation. A promise of 500 pages will enable creatives who've probably now mastered ActionScripts (albeit unaided) to breathe a sigh of relief and learn how they could have done it more efficiently.

"Another highlight is the improved integration with *Generator*. This now appears to be a stable and serious business solution. More and more projects are demanding dynamic *Flash* content, and the ability to author and deploy this content is easier in comparison to the somewhat standalone *Flash 4*.

"However, I still don't think Macromedia has got it right for the creative new media designer. *Flash 5* has additional back-end functionality, good integration with *Generator* and it supports XML and so on.

"However, creatives are idea generators, and the method and fluency of implementing these ideas is key. A basic fundamental flaw seems to have been overlooked again: the authoring interface.

"It's an archaic and almost cumbersome user interface, and has remained constant throughout the several releases and is still prevalent in the latest release. The basics – selecting objects in layers at various points on the timeline, attempting to select individual elements of a composition of Bézier curves – are incredibly frustrating tasks. I must have been through 100 clicks attempting to do such a simple task.

"This release still can't render type clearly when you get down to what designers regard as a safe font size (12pt).

"My other gripe is the lack of third-party tools. Part of *Director's* success is the support it's received from third-party developers: *Flash's* is virtually non-existent.

"But it's not all doom and gloom. The development of the back-end functionality is a definite plus: collaborations between creative and technical disciplines should now produce innovative and mind-blowing *Flash*-based solutions.

"Macromedia's repositioning of itself as a provider of content tools rather than just authoring tools is positive move. However, this still doesn't get a designer-friendly seal of approval."

_02

NAME: Mickey Stretton
TITLE: Senior design consultant
COMPANY: Digit

"Just as Adobe is crossing the Ts and dotting the Is on its own SVG software, Macromedia responds with *Flash 5*. Undoubtedly, the major improvement over v4 is its advanced scripting potential, but there are many other improvements. Bézier curves and drag-and-drop paths finally make their long-awaited debut, as do inspector panels for text, stroke, fill and, well, pretty much everything.

"Open them all up and you'll be lucky if you can still see your movie, but a launcher bar in the bottom right-hand corner of the window (à la *Dreamweaver*) enables you to show and hide any with a simple click. They might only seem like small improvements, but bundle them all together, chuck in a Movie Explorer, customisable keyboard shortcuts and the like, and what you're left with is about an extra hour down the pub.

"*Flash 5* really excels with its *FreeHand* compatibility. Because of its vector capabilities, I often use *FreeHand* in the design stages of any *Flash* project to design the look and feel of the site and its various sections. Previously, this procedure involved exporting my documents in .swf format out of *FreeHand*, importing into *Flash* and then rebuilding the layered design on the stage.

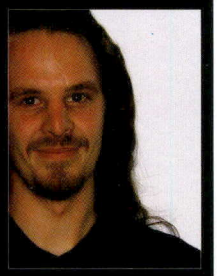
"With *Flash 5*, you can open up a *FreeHand* document (v7+) and preserve the info. This means that all layers, draggable guides, symbol libraries and pages (each of which can be converted to individual scenes or keyframes) are intact and usable. Plus, *FreeHand 9* has the ability to design in *Flash* anti-alias mode as well as preview and keyline, so you can see exactly what you're going to get without having to switch apps.

"On the scripting side, a frame actions inspector now enables you to view and edit the code of any selected frame. This saves a lot of time, and with the inspector being resizable, you can at last see all your scripting in a window larger than the postage stamp-sized one in *Flash 4*.

"My only gripe is with the coding: it's undergone a fairly major facelift, and is now written using JavaScript syntax and commands. While I more than welcome the improvements, I've only just got my head around v4's scripting language – and I can't bear to think that it was all for nothing..."

_03

NAME: Finn Taylor
TITLE: Director
COMPANY:
Liquid Light Digital



"*Flash* has become the defacto standard for dynamic Web media, providing the Web with the injection of functionality in terms of both interactivity and animation. As a new media company, any advance is hotly anticipated, as this enables us to create an even greater, media rich environment.

"First off, Macromedia has added tabbed palettes, which makes the package much more intuitive and efficient to use. However, the GUI additions go further than this, providing user-definable shortcuts, which will greatly enhance productivity. I'm a little disappointed the timeline wasn't considered more, which has always been a bit primitive. *LiveMotion* provides a far more intuitive interface – maybe next time.

"As far as the drawing tools go, at last a proper Bézier pen tool has been added: this has been such a shortcoming in the past, but finally the control is here.

"While there are many other additions such as XML transfer and Web printing support, now onto the real stuff: ActionScripts. This is something which makes the upgrade truly exciting. One thing which has always been lacking in *Flash* is true interactivity – a powerful scripting language.

"*Flash* has had limited scripting capabilities, but they've been difficult to harness. For any true interactive functionality beyond a few rollovers and so on, *Director Shockwave* was the way to go.

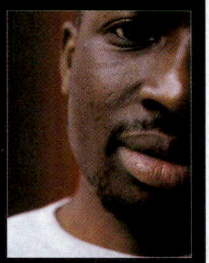
"While the new scripting language is JavaScript-like in syntax, *Flash 5* provides a very intuitive interface into this, which should enable even the novice to start producing sophisticated interactive code. Additional to this are smart clips, which are similar to *Director's* behaviours, which should enable *Flash* developers to produce and distribute pre-made functions and features.

While ActionScript is great, here comes my big gripe: why create and make us learn yet another language? I can now see myself spending hours in debugging hell as I confuse syntax. The addition of Lingo (or a server-side variant of it) would have been great. Then, if you're already fluent in *Director*, you could start developing server-side features. Just a thought.

"However, while I might moan, *Flash 5* is great. It should enable us to create far more powerful and interactive Web features."

_04

NAME: Charles Oyebade
TITLE: Flash artist
COMPANY: Bepaid.com



"Being the primary tool of our trade, what happens in this new version affects the way our business operates. The first thing you notice is the whole look of the program: it's clear that Macromedia is moving towards a universal interface between its packages *and* between Mac and PC platforms.

"The really impressive parts of the interface are the floating palette icons: although they do add more clutter to the screen, overall they will probably give you greater control over certain attributes.

"Another notable improvement is that when you select a colour, it remains for all subsequent tools.

"What else? The Movie Explorer is really beneficial if you work in teams. It means you can search through a colleague's .fla file and find exactly where that object appears in that movie, instead of having to search all the layers and frames in the timeline.

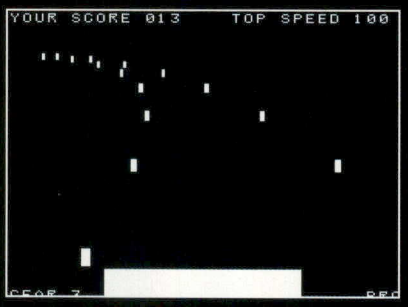
"The introduction of the Bézier tool is also a huge improvement to the basic and sometimes crude drawing tools. Plus, there's the bonus of an improved eyedropper tool, which means you no longer have to break a bitmap apart to be able to select a colour.

"The ActionScripting was always going to be a major issue in v5 too, and it's received a facelift. The arrangement of the scripting has been improved so the movie clip that's being effected is at the beginning of the sentence, which makes it so much easier to work. Although Macromedia has included drag-and-drop commands to make life easier for the novice, there are so many commands that it can seem overwhelming. In terms of ActionScripting, v5 has many new possibilities, but it's going to take longer to master them.

"To test these elements, we attempted to make a sound mixer using *Flash 5*. In the previous version, this would have been very crude, but you can now control the level of a sound clip in a movie, and control movie clips and sounds in a more advanced way.

"Overall, there are some much needed improvements. As for highlights, the Movie Explorer is going to be a major one. There's still room for improvement – *Flash* is not the most stable program – so Autosave would be a welcome addition in the future. But despite that, I can't wait to get *Flash 5*." ■

Videogaming has changed.



Night Driver, Atari Games, 1976

OutRun, Sega, 1986

Ridge Racer, Namco, 1994

Ferrari F355 Challenge, Sega, 2000

So has its bible.

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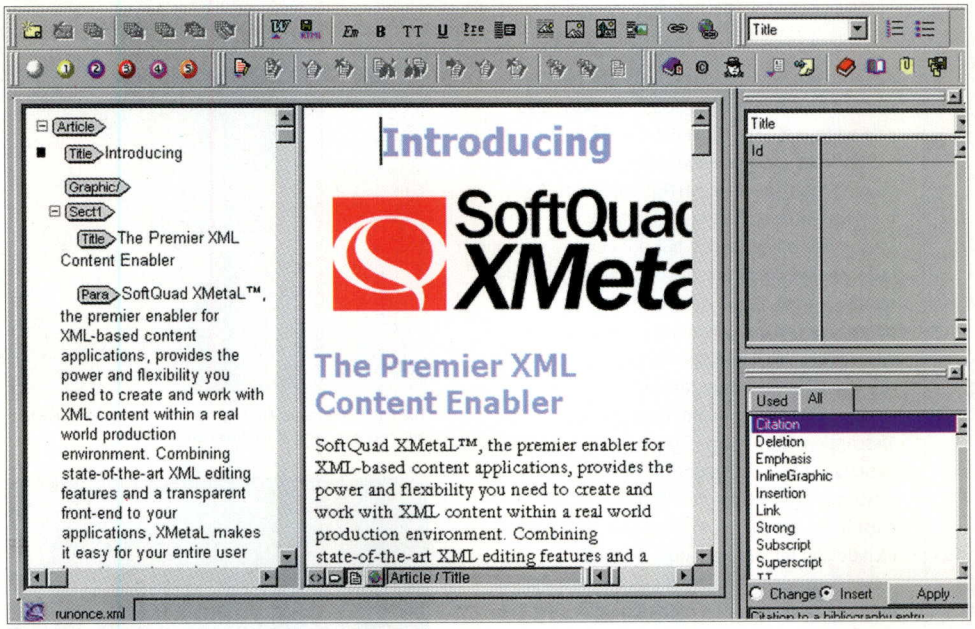
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Insertion
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runonce.xml

The familiar interface of *HoTMetaL* harnessed in a package for editing XML documents. Did we say cluttered?

XMETAL 2.0

FOLLOWING ON FROM *HOTMETAL PRO*, SOFTQUAD HAS LAUNCHED *XMETAL 2.0*. BUT IS IT THE PREMIER XML CONTENT ENABLER IT CLAIMS TO BE?

Softquad started life producing software for editing SGML documents. This helped its transition into developing high-end HTML editing tools and now it's given the company an edge in the market as XML begins to gather pace.

XMetaL 2.0 looks familiar. Its interface structure is virtually identical to *HoTMetaL PRO*, with many small additions. *HoTMetaL* has a fixed DOM aimed at authoring HTML; *XMetaL* enables you to import XML DTDs (Document Template Definitions) and work in any scripting language created using XML. (extensible mark-up language), which isn't a scripting language as such, but a method for defining scripting languages. Like HTML, it has roots in SGML, but while HTML is fixed, you can invent new XML tags. And it's what all Web pages are going to be made of soon. We can say this with confidence, because the latest HTML definition to come out of the W3C isn't an HTML spec at all – it's a version of HTML rendered in XML called XHTML.

XMetaL 2.0 is unique in that it hacks XML DTDs just like other tools hack HTML. The primary way of working is using a live WYSIWYG window coupled with a Tags On mode that enables you to mark up content with whatever tags are available in the current active DTD. Like *HoTMetaL*, a live resource window, attributes panels and a tag palette provide rudimentary drag-and-drop capabilities. Masochists can crunch code in Text Only mode.

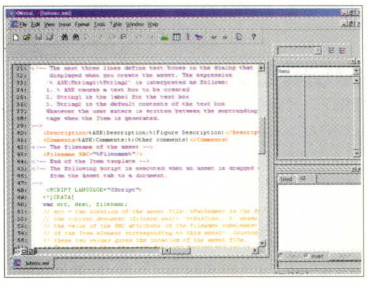
It also incorporates some extra bits that smooth the transition between more prevalent protocols and languages, while acknowledging the enhanced connectivity XML offers. ODBC database import is particularly welcome, as is the ability to work with JavaScript, VBScript, ASP and other scripting tools using the templates provided. As is becoming standard for modern authoring tools, *XMetaL* can be further extended and customised through access to the program's Document Object Model.

Some features translate better than others. CSS2 styles in *HoTMetaL* are faithfully reproduced with access to elements from the current template. The Workspace manager features don't fair as well. An XML document can generate more clutter than an HTML document. Arguably, the *HoTMetaL* interface was never very strong in the first place with so many dockable bits that attach themselves unpredictably to the limited space. We turned docking off and floated the windows.

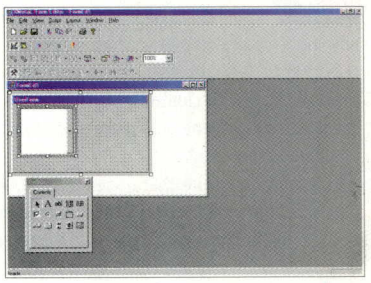
One huge letdown is that there are no integrated tools for creating your own DTDs, though you can edit pre-existing files. This was a major criticism of the first release that has yet to be corrected.

XMetaL 2.0 is the only real XML contender available for general use and it packs a lot into a small space. Until there's a friendlier-looking program that enables you to plug in different DTDs with the same ease, it'll stay at the top. Macromedia has already rebuilt *Dreamweaver* so that it can customised with XML. How long can it be before there's a version aimed at XML authoring? ■

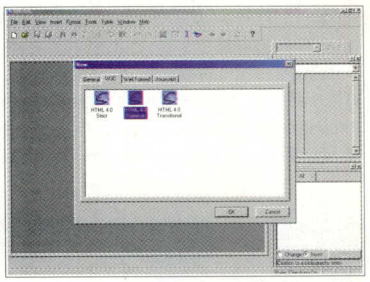
TEXT: **KARL HODGE**



The combination of colour-coded text editing alongside drag-and-drop capabilities makes *XMetaL 2.0* a powerful proposition.



The forms editor enables you to create combo and dialogue boxes powered by JavaScript or VBScript – a handy little tool to have around.



You can open existing documents without a DTD, but you can't create new ones in *XMetaL*. Try www.dtd.com to see if someone else has already designed an XML mark-up language that suits your purpose.

DETAILS

PRICE: £300
CONTACT: www.softquad.com
PLATFORM: PC
REQUIREMENTS: Win 95/98/NT 4/2000; Pentium133 or faster; 32MB RAM
FEATURES: XML editor and document conversion
Edit existing documents without DTD
Structure view to navigate through document
Word-like styles and CSS support
Custom menus and macros
Program scripting
Built-in colour-coded script editor
Forms editor
Tags on view
WYSIWYG editing

SIGNPOSTER 3

PRICE: £35 (standard); £45 (professional)
CONTACT: www.signposter.com
PLATFORM: PC
REQUIREMENTS:
486DX processor; Win 95/98/NT/2000;
8MB RAM; 5MB HD

Getting a site noticed on the Web is something that many designers can easily overlook. Uploading a ground-breaking design can come to nothing if no-one knows your site exists.

SignPoster is a cute application that analyses your site's content, creates basic META information and generates reports on how to improve existing tags.

It also has a feature that generates gateway pages, or 'signposts', by summarising your site into a single HTML file, which acts as a search-engine magnet. The principle is this – even if your site is relegated to the lower rankings of the search results (because of information being spread across multiple pages for example), the signpost should improve your chances of making it to the top of the league.

So, what of the interface? It's clear and effectively wizard-based, which can be somewhat limiting and fiddly to configure. However, a host of help files and contextual information make it easier to use and understand. As well as comprehensive help files, good support is also offered through the *SignPoster* website.

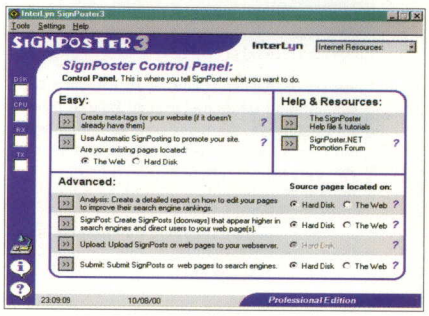
SignPoster removes extraneous line breaks, tab spacings and so on, and HTML colours are used for visual interest. This results in fairly basic-looking final pages, but does ensure efficient code when rendered by the browser or spidered by search engines. If you want to customise these pages, you can do so manually, although the chances are you'll end up inflating the code and risk lowering your result ranking.

Along with the standard 'keyword' and 'description' META tags, *SignPoster* also includes basic tags for search-engine spiders plus classifications, and so on. Although enough for most users, the option to configure *SignPoster* to include additional tags would be useful.

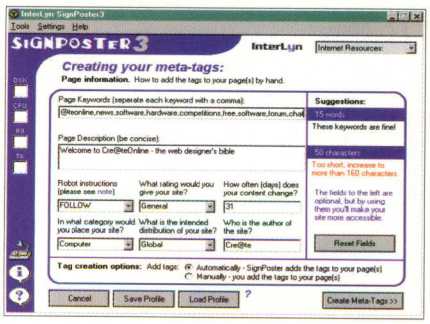
SignPoster can then automate the procedure of inserting relevant META data and uploading your site to the server and submitting it in one single action to a handful of search engines. An updated list of supported search engines is freely available to install automatically too, via *SignPoster's* built-in AutoRenew feature.

All in all, this is a useful app, but more flexible META tools are available. That said, it has one crucial advantage over the competition – its price.

TEXT: **CHRIS SCHMIDT**



***SignPoster's* control-panel interface with primary functions. Note the comprehensive contextual help files located as question mark icons.**



Main META tag categories. *Signposter* keeps track of your 'keyword' count, and alerts you if your description could be altered to improve your site's ranking.

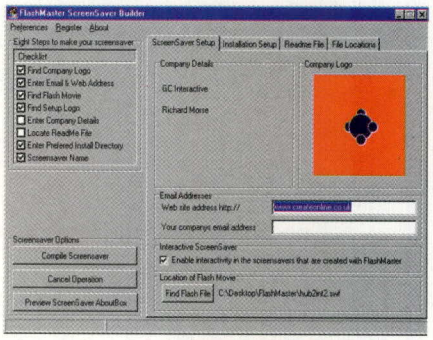
FLASHMASTER

PRICE: £49.95
CONTACT: www.prosof.net
PLATFORM: PC
REQUIREMENTS: 200MHz Pentium PC, 32MB RAM

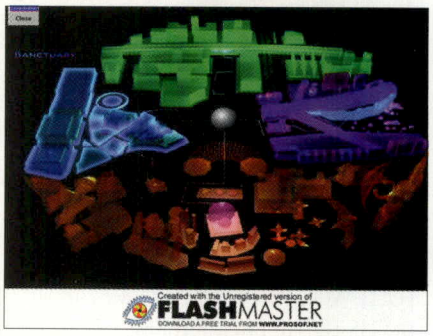
FlashMaster is a application designed to enable conversion of *Flash* movies (SWF) into screensavers for use with Windows 95, 98 and NT.

First off, you're presented with an eight-step checklist that must be completed before a screensaver set-up program can be created. Besides selecting the *Flash* movie, specifying an install directory and attaching a ReadMe file, your company and contact information, including logo, is entered at this time and later becomes accessible through the screensaver About box. Although clearly beneficial for businesses, we found the compulsory nature of these steps unnecessary and time-consuming when considering private, non-commercial use.

Unlike the more traditional screensavers, where customisable settings must be written using raw code for interpretation by the operating system, with *FlashMaster* you can build them into the *Flash* movie. This enables you to exploit the extensive programming potential of the *Flash* software in order to produce captivating and interactive screensavers. The latest version of the software enables the inclusion of multiple movies within each screensaver, consequently enabling you to use a greater number of *Flash* functions such as Load Movie. The maker, Prosof, appears to be keen to ensure that *FlashMaster* provides for the more advanced *Flash* user and movie. Look out for upgrades later this year, in line with the launch of *Flash 5*.



The build process on *Flashmaster* is a little long-winded, but once overcome it produces great results.



Whatever you're using it for, business or otherwise, *Flashmaster* can turn your movies into customised screensavers. Take a look at the free trial on offer.

Despite the aid of a checklist, the build process could have been simplified with a more intuitive and inspiring interface. Menu items with misleading titles and the duplication of buttons does not enhance the user experience. Nevertheless, a help file is provided in the set-up, which offers step-by-step instructions.

With the inclusion of screensavers as give-aways in many contemporary websites – and the popularity of the *Flash* software and *Shockwave* toys – this is a useful tool for the production of more enticing screensavers.

TEXT: **RICHARD MORSE**

ON THE CD

You can try out both products reviewed on this page – demos of *FlashMaster* and *SignPoster* are on this issue's CD. ■

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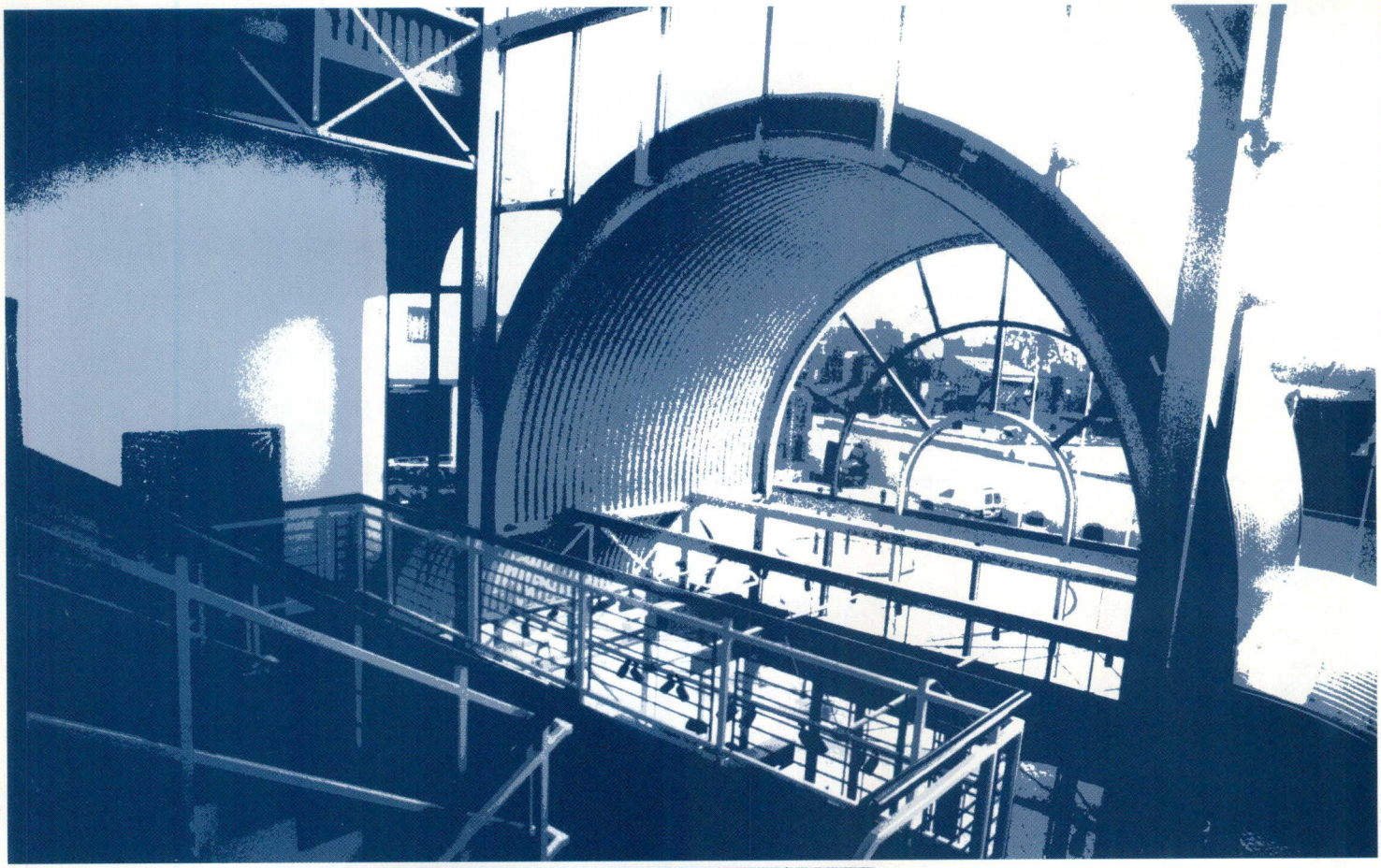

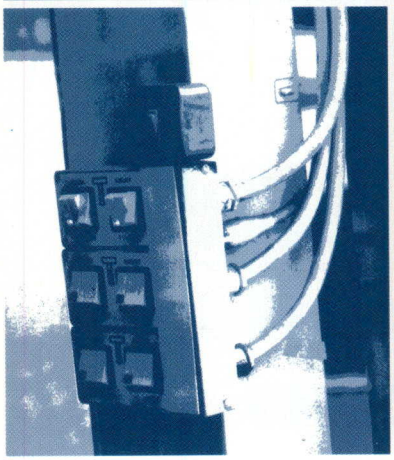

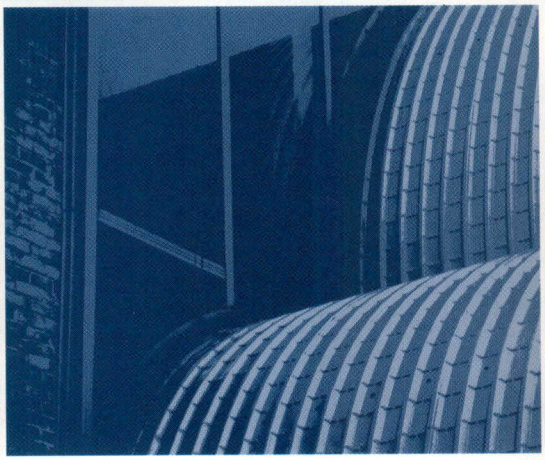

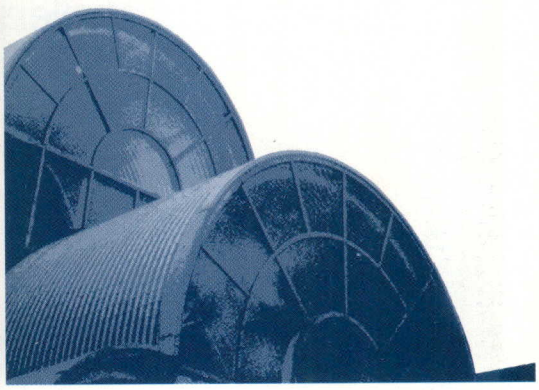

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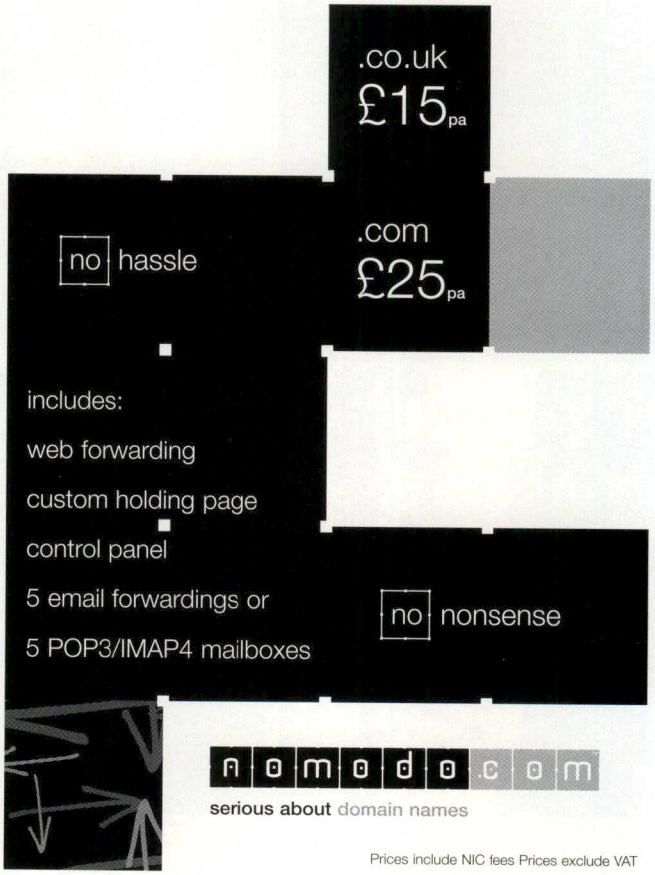
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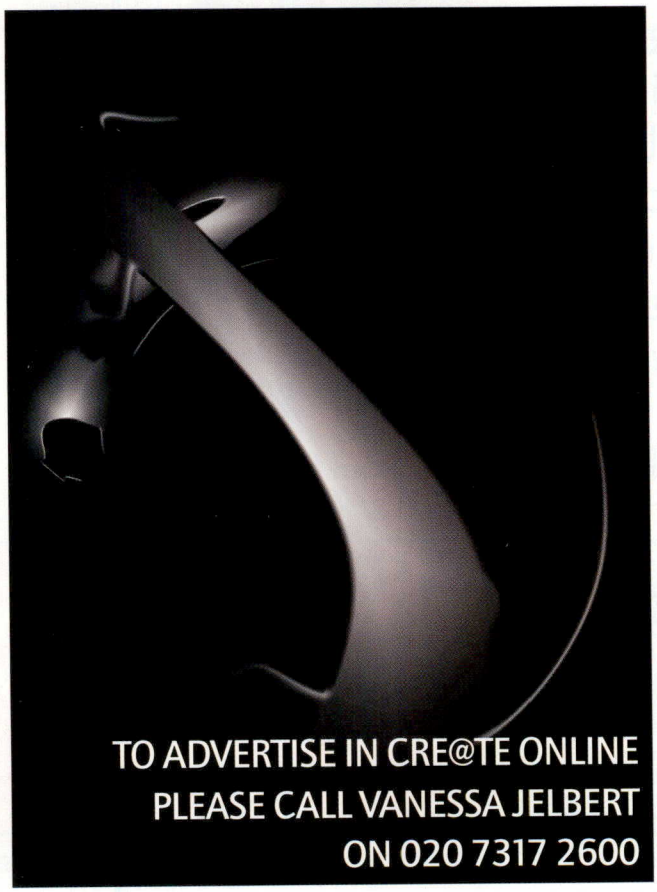

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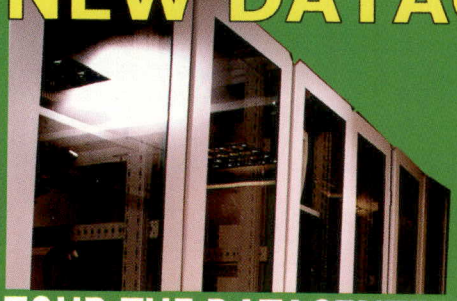

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"There's a million new recruitment agencies that have sprung up," says Organic's creative director Darryl Feldman. "But I would say there's only a few that are any good." So how do you find out which ones they are?

First off, find out how long the recruitment company has been going and who it's got on its books. "If you go to a recruitment consultant who's got a client such as the BBC on its books, that can be a good sign," says Feldman. "The BBC are going to want a relationship with someone that's long term."

GO TO AN INTERVIEW

Not only do you need to have the skills necessary for potential jobs; you need to match a company's culture, too. Therefore, a good agency will try and find out about your personality.

"You may have to give up your time but it's worth it," says Victoria Lubbock, MD of Recruitmedia. "There are a lot of questions you can ask about the client base, the history and the success. How guarded a recruitment agency is will depend on where it's at."

Feel free to ask the company for testimonials from other people it's placed, too, she advises. If it's pukka, it'll have no problem with this.

BEWARE OF BULL

How do you detect when an agency is talking baloney? "If it starts to sell you something before it even knows what your skills are, then you can be sure it's not doing a good job," says Darryl Feldman.

"If the agency's very pushy, I'd put it at the scale of someone merely wanting a (commission) fee," adds Victoria Lubbock. "If the company listens and advises, then it's likely to be genuinely interested and wanting to help your career."

BEWARE OF SPRAY AND PRAY

Most agencies earn their daily bread by taking a royalty based on your starting wage. So many tend to farm out your CV far and wide in the hope of getting a taker. But that's not really their job.

"You can waste a lot of people's time just putting forward heaps of candidates up for a role and hoping. It's called 'spray and pray'; and it's deeply irritating because it clogs the whole system of recruitment up from the client's (employer's) angle."

"It leaves a bad taste in my mouth if we recruit somebody who's good, but the agency doesn't seem to have done anything to deserve its commission," says Mike Dicks, business manager at Bomb.

GET PROTECTION

"Go as far as to find out whether the agency's registered with the data protection act," says Victoria Lubbock. "Any candidate can come and inspect our records and see what we've written about them. Not that we encourage them to, but we tell them they can. And I think that's fair enough."

fogey rock

OLDIES CAN STILL BE GOODIES

The Web's shiny exterior is new, modern, and young. Everything about the technology screams Contemporary, Now, Youth. So do you stand a chance in the industry if you remember old money, the Hillman Imp and watching *Thunderbirds* the first time around?

You might be in luck. The government's Information Technology National Training Organisation (INTNO) recently carried out a study which produced a few interesting statistics. While it found that only 30 per cent of IT professionals are over 45-years-old, it also found that between 1994 and 1998, the 50-54 and the 60-plus age groups saw the biggest growth in IT recruitment nationwide. Recruitment of those in their early 50s rose by 79 per cent, and for the 60-plus age range, the figure was 61 per cent.

This figure is admittedly a little bit IT-focused; networkers, and systems analyst types made up a large percentage of the sample. But traditionally, Web trends tend to follow those of its hardcore IT counterpart. This isn't to say that your Nan's about to go out and get herself a job as a *Flash* programmer. But if you still remember the days when the EU was called the EEC, you might not have such a hard time looking for a new job after all.

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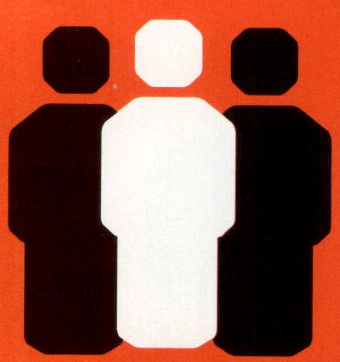


A WEEK IN THE LIFE...

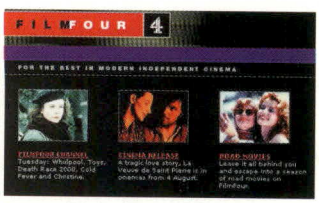
what is a managing director?

FINBAR HAWKINS ON A TYPICAL WEEK AS A MANAGING DIRECTOR

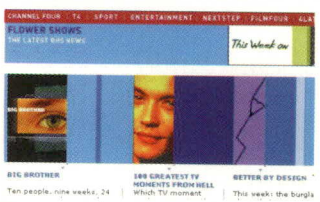
CREATE@ONLINE CONTINUES TO OFFER AN INSIDE VIEW ON THE DIFFERENT ROLES IN THE NEW MEDIA INDUSTRY

Name:	Finbar Hawkins
Age:	29
Job title:	Managing director
Employer Website:	Bomb Productions (www.bomb.co.uk)
History:	Started off in CD-ROM production. In 1995, moved into the Web industry where he worked as a producer at Online Magic. Decided to set up Bomb in late 1997 so he could focus on interactive entertainment.
Past projects:	Lego (www.lego.com/technic), Channel 4 site redesigns (www.channel4.com), the FilmFour launch site, and Two Minutes (www.two-minutes.com), an online interactive murder mystery focused round the eclipse.
Finest project:	"The latest stuff that we've been doing for Lego in terms of the way we've been developing new work processes and collaborating closely with other companies."

Finbar and his team have produced a major site providing a mass of info on the Lego Technic range.



Built in conjunction with Your Show Productions, the launch site for Film Four was unveiled on 1st November 1998.



Redesigned last summer, the Channel 4 site is credible and effective.

MONDAY
"We begin the week in earnest. There's a large-scale pitch for a European client going on. I have to have presentations ready by Thursday for the team flying out on Friday. Another team is in mid-concept for a current client. Bomb is also co-producing a pilot for a TV company and the afternoon is spent with their executive producer."

TUESDAY
"We begin with scheduling as in who's working on what, with whom, for how long. I also liaise with our producers. The afternoon consists of meetings with our business manager about budget and structure."

WEDNESDAY
"The pitch for our European client is now running at full steam. The art director and business manager collate designs and presentation material. We end with a meeting with a media agent for rolling out a sequel to last summer's two-minutes.com."

THURSDAY
"We start with an internal meeting about resources for the next couple of months. Our lease on our first machines is over so we negotiate a new one to provide much needed improvements to LAN."

FRIDAY
"Today is deadline city for everything. Our current client approves the concept designs. The European pitch goes well – we're through to the prototyping phase."

They can be loved or loathed. They can rule with a fair hand or be overbearing, boorish tyrants who take their stress out on their employees. But at the end of the day, managing directors are the people who have built up the Web industry into an entity that can offer a viable and secure future for a mass of creative and technical people.

The role of MD has been long talked about since the dawn of business but many employees still aren't fully versed in the complex challenges that the MD must face on a weekly basis. Finbar Hawkins set up Bomb Productions two years ago and through his efforts and those of his staff, has seen the company grow into an acclaimed interactive entertainment company with an employee roster of 24 bodies.

His responsibilities are diverse: "The MD makes sure that the company is going in the right direction," offers Finbar. "I have teams that work on several projects at any one time which are made up of designers, programmers and producers. They are effectively making sure the projects come in on time and on budget. I make sure that they are resourced correctly. It's my job to make sure that staff are working in a comfortable environment so that they know where things are, and that we are all working in tandem."

This attitude is reflected in the recent launch of the Bomb-created Lego site. The whole process kicked off over a year ago and, typically for a budding company, the MD was pitching in with everyone else, as well as running the firm: "It was quite hands-on at the beginning when the company only had 12 people," explains Finbar. "So I was taking the role of executive producer on the project, and we slowly made sure that the project was being developed the way it should be. This included putting together the things to pitch for the job, getting boards created, and writing documents."

Midway through the project, Finbar recruited more staff and brought a producer on-board to oversee the site's creation. Now in a more traditional MD role, Finbar is no longer on the project full-time: "I'll make sure that I have regular meetings with that producer and their team members," offers Finbar. "But it's their responsibility and I'm only going to come along if there is a problem or something new to see."

With the company well and truly up on its feet, Finbar now finds himself spending only 10-15 minutes a day on the Lego project. "For the rest of the day, there are five or six other projects to deal with," he says. On top of these, he also has to contend with the usual run-of-the-mill tasks that any MD has to endure, from cash flow and leasing new machines to reviewing company structure.

So does this restrict the amount of time Finbar has to be creative? "I like to be involved at the beginning of the projects," explains Finbar. "One of the hardest things is delegating. This means that people go away, put ideas together and then actually pitch them at me to see what I think because I can't be involved in 15 different meetings. The nature of the job is that I'm not going to be able to see one thing all the way through because we're a company and we have to have other projects!"

Ultimately being an MD also means that if something goes wrong, even if it is beyond your control at the time, you'll be the one in the firing line. There was one project for Channel 4 that threw up some challenging problems: "We had all sorts of problems with *Cold Fusion* and we were having to hack it while we had the client screaming at us," says Finbar. "You don't know if you're going to survive from one minute to the next." ■

TEXT: **ADAM PHILLIPS**/PHOTOGRAPHY: **NICK WILSON**

"THE MD MAKES SURE THE COMPANY IS GOING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. I HAVE TEAMS THAT WORK ON SEVERAL PROJECTS AT ANY ONE TIME, AND THEY'RE ALL VERY EFFECTIVE IN MAKING SURE THE PROJECTS COME IN ON TIME AND ON BUDGET"

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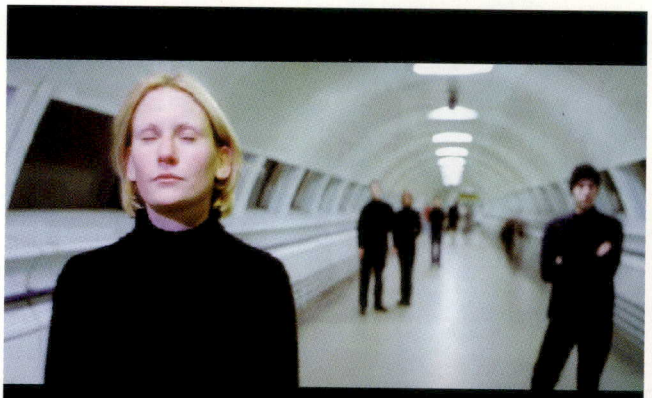

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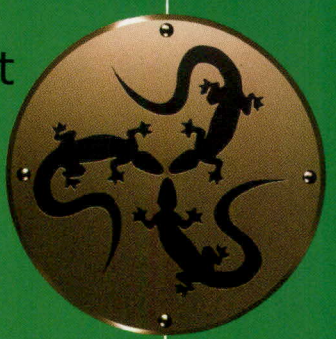

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Ref: SR/CREA/1000

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Ref: SR/CREA/1001

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Ref: SR/CREA/1002

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Ref: RE/CREA/1003

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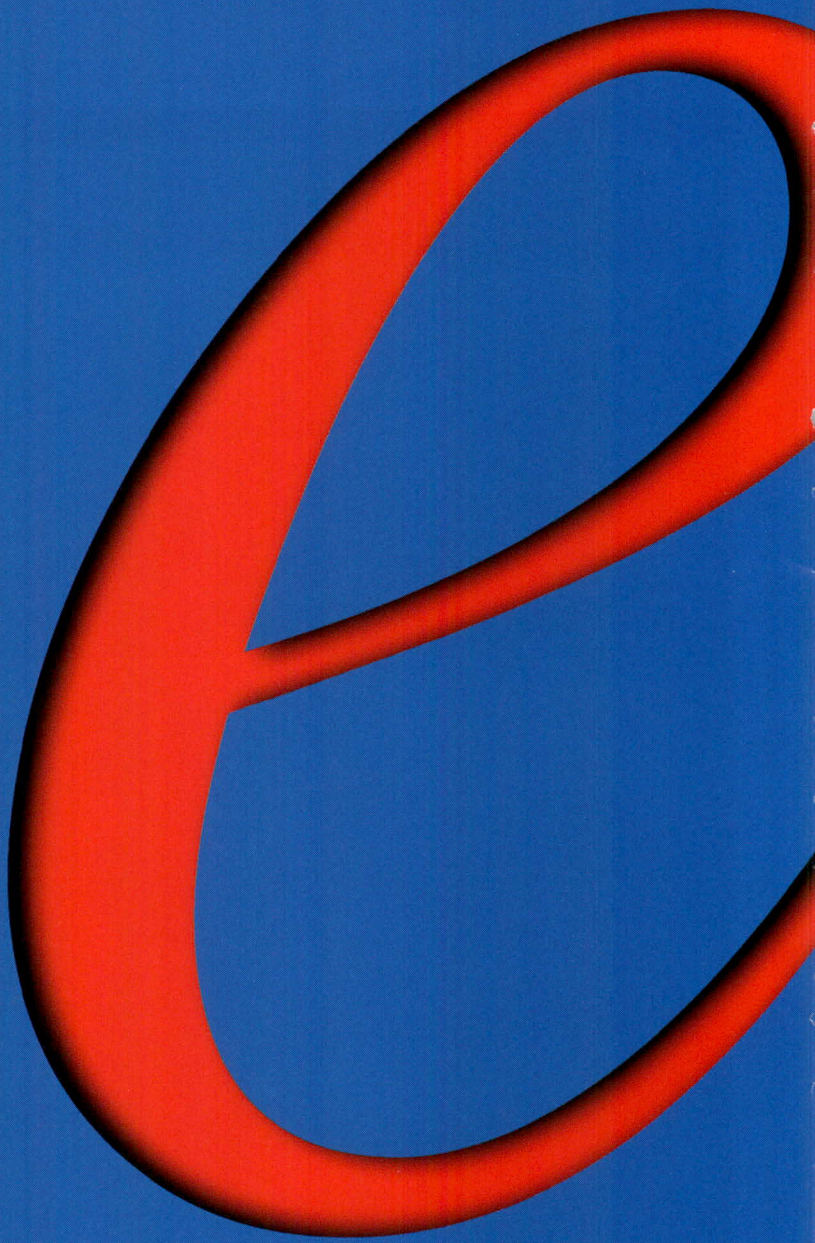

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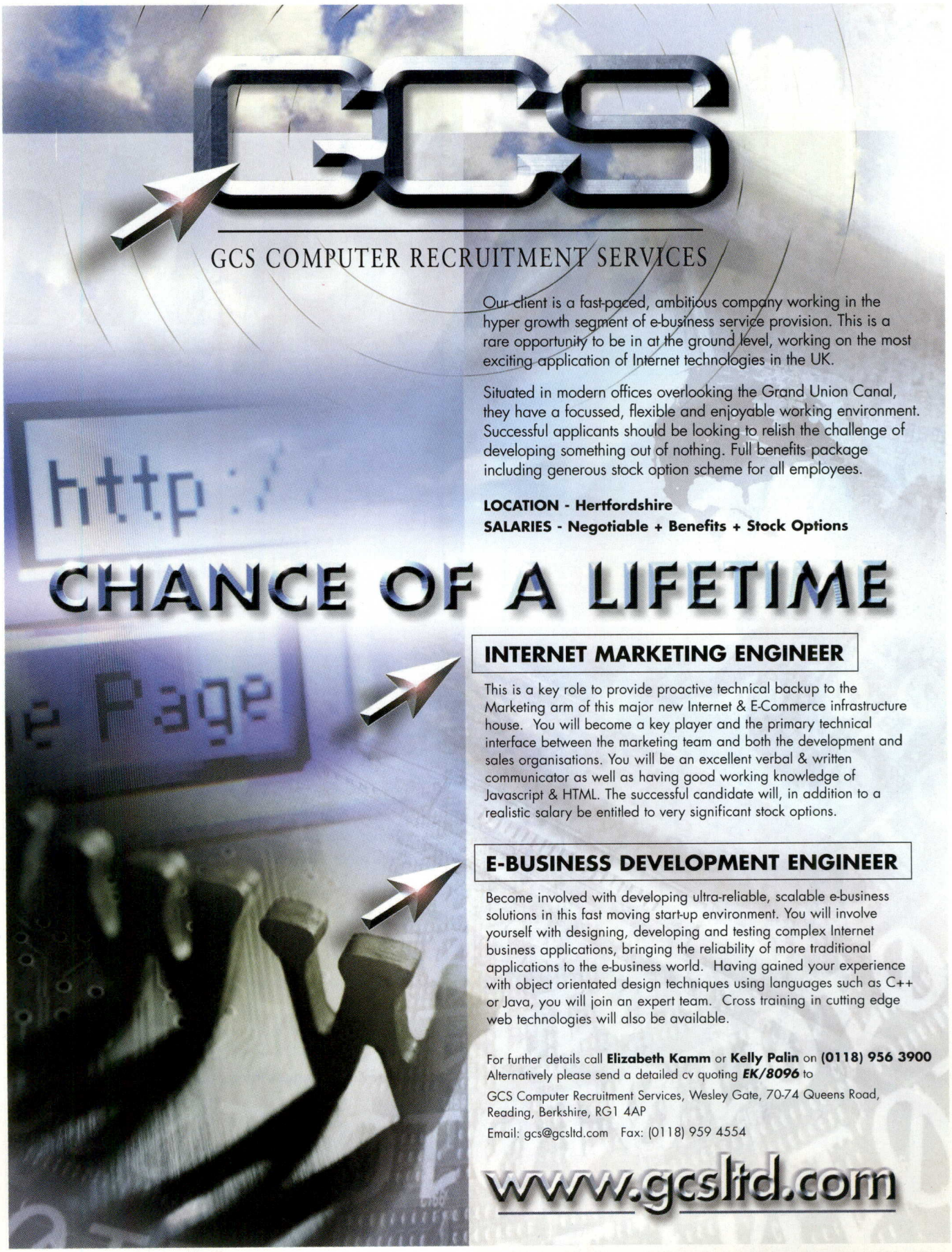
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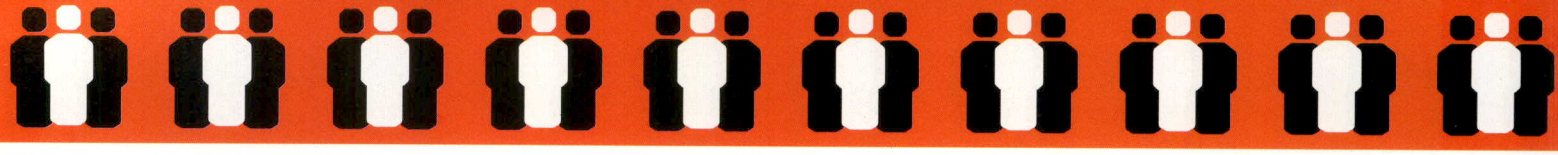

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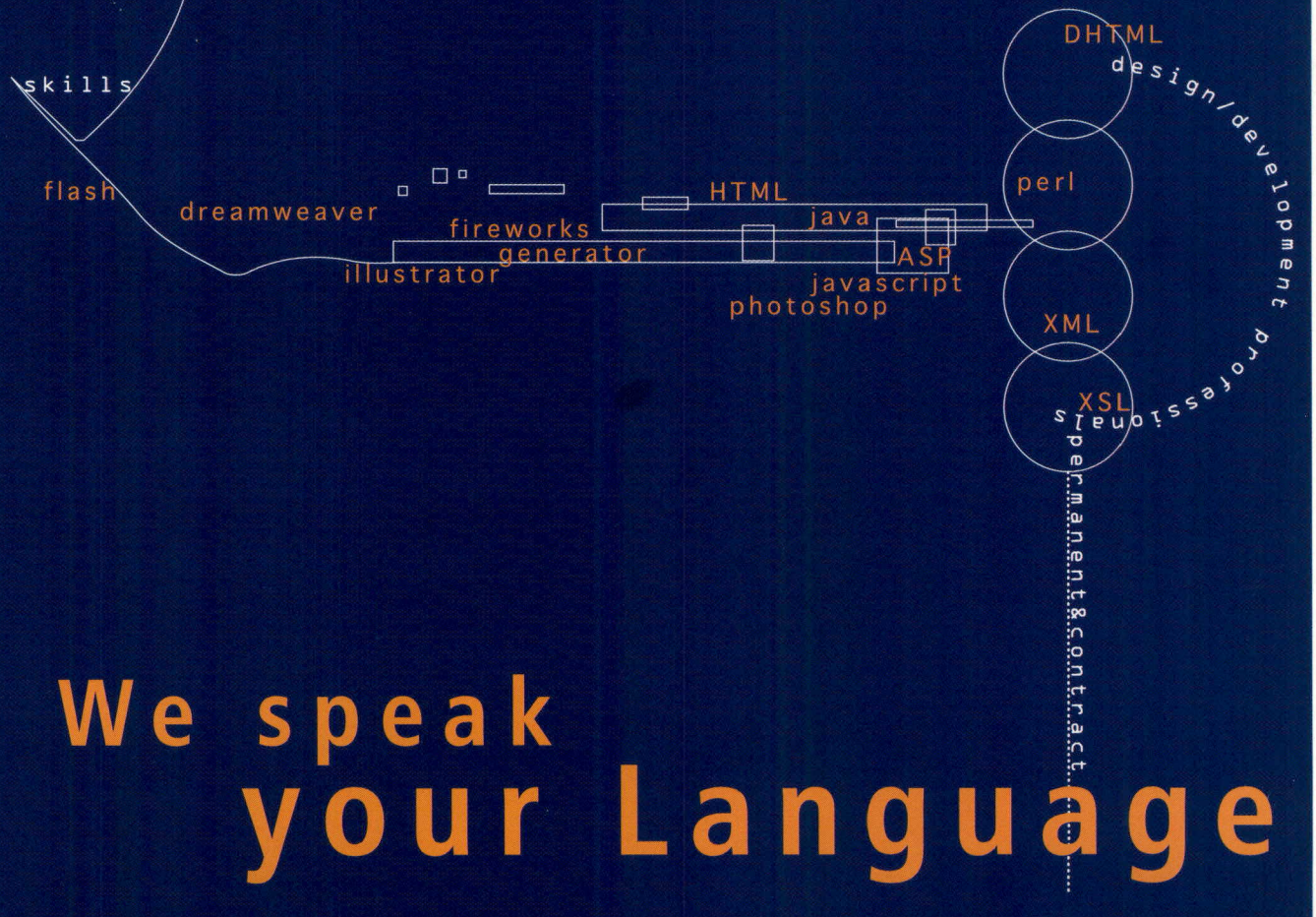

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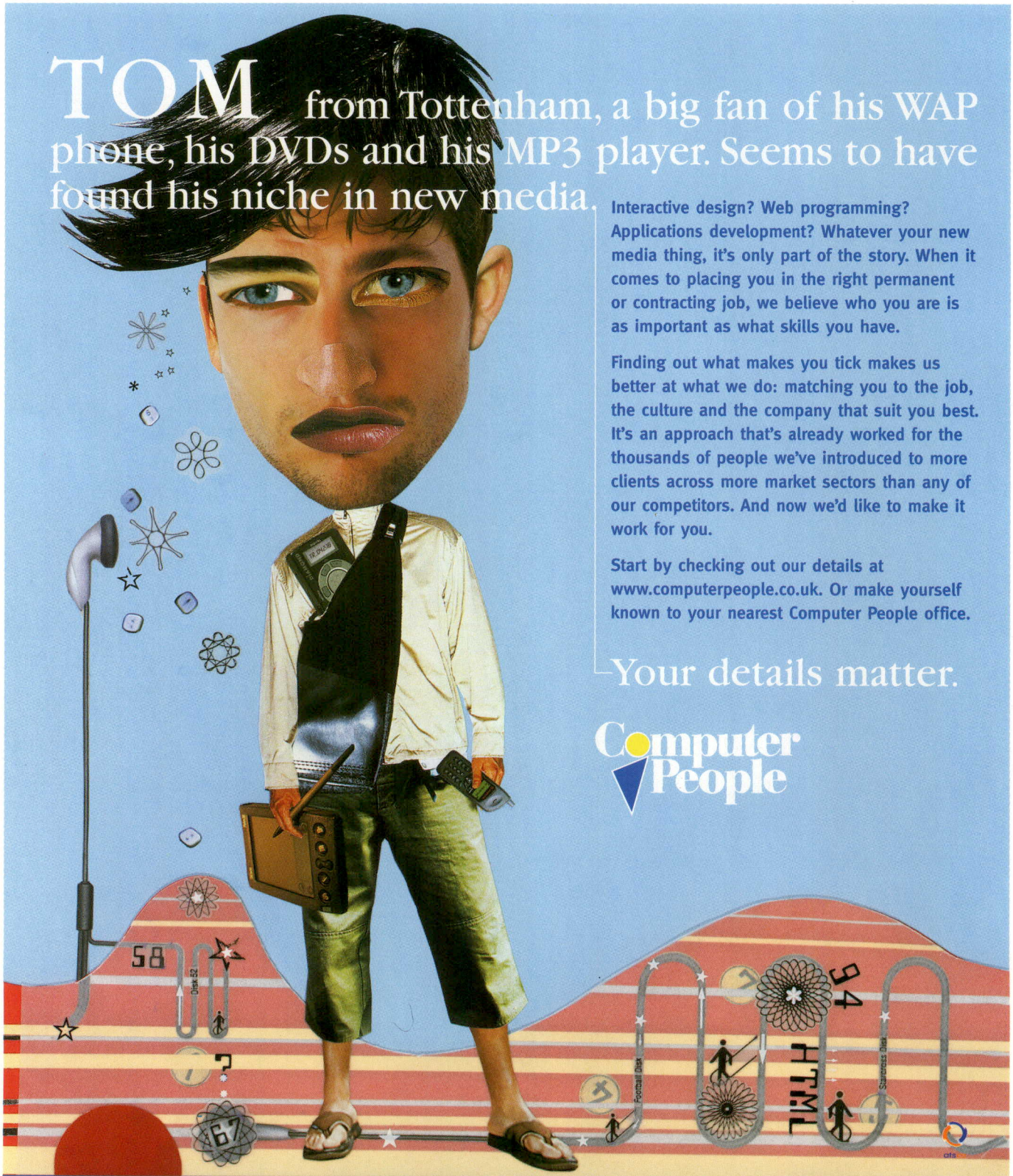
TOM from Tottenham, a big fan of his WAP phone, his DVDs and his MP3 player. Seems to have found his niche in new media.



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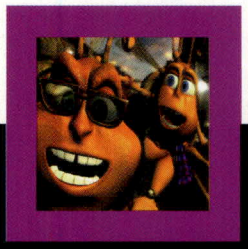
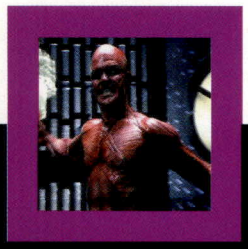
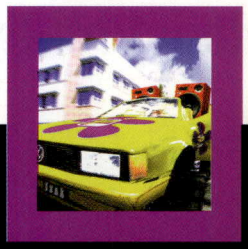

ISSUE 04

3D world

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pivotal top tens

OUR REGULAR LOOK AT WHAT'S HOT ON THE WEB, WHICH SITES ARE ATTRACTING THE MOST VISITORS AND OUR OWN OFFICE SELECTION OF THE MONTH

TOP TEN WEB DEVELOPER SITES

The most popular developer sites on the Web measured by unique users

1. **AOL and Netscape** (www.aol.com/webcenter)
2. **MSDN Online** (http://msdn.microsoft.com)
3. **World Wide Web Consortium** (www.w3.org)
4. **Sun Microsystems** (www.sun.com)
5. **Adobe** (www.adobe.com)
6. **Internet.com!** (www.internet.com)
7. **Symantec Corporation** (www.symantec.com)
8. **Big Mailbox** (www.bigmailbox.com)
9. **Apache Project** (www.apache.com)
10. **Developer.com** (www.developer.com)

Source: www.100hot.com

OUR TOP TEN

The quirky sites around

1. **Rocketpoweredmice** (www.rocketpowered mice.com)
2. **Tomboy-Films** (www.tomboy-films.co.uk)
3. **Chaff** (www.chaffonline.co.uk)
4. **DeControl** (www.decontrol.com)
5. **Practice Design** (www.practicedesign.co.uk)
6. **SleazeNation** (www.sleazenation.com)
7. **Wireframe** (www.wireframe.co.za)
8. **Neopod** (www.neopod.cjb.net)
9. **Kama-Sooty** (www.kama-sooty.co.uk)
10. **TheRemediProject** (www.theremedi project.com)

TOP TEN ONLINE ADVERTISERS

The top advertising players ranked by banner ad impressions

1. **TRUSTe**
2. **Microsoft**
3. **Yahoo**
4. **AllAdvantage**
5. **America Online**
6. **Amazon**
7. **eBay**
8. **Casino on net**
9. **Barnes and Noble**
10. **Next Card**

Source: Nielsen/Net ratings

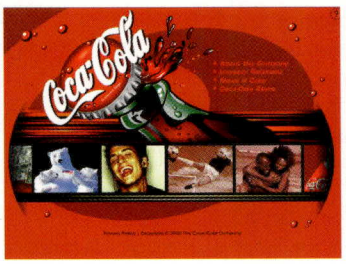
TOP TEN MUSIC SITES

The sound sites that received the largest number of unique visitors in July

1. **CDNow** (www.cdnow.com)
2. **MTV Online** (www.mtv.com)
3. **MP3** (www.mp3.com)
4. **Napster** (www.napster.com)
5. **AudioFind** (www.audiofind.com)
6. **My Yahoo!** (www.my.yahoo.com)
7. **Harmony Central** (www.harmony-central.com)
8. **mIRC-X** (www.mircx.com)
9. **Launch** (www.launch.com)
10. **Go Network** (www.go.com)

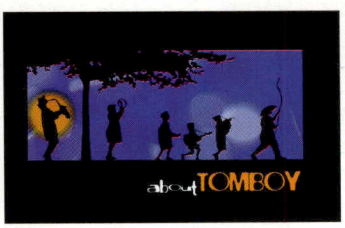
Source: www.100hot.com

News, reviews, sales and more from CDNow, the current hottest UK music site.



The Real Thing. History, news, even the mysterious bottling system are covered in Coca-Cola's site.

All the top world sports are covered along with audio and visual clips by ESPN, the top entertainment site.



A classy and slick introduction to the work of Tomboy-Films, complete with showreels.

TOP TEN ENTERTAINMENT SITES

The sites fighting it out for the top spot in the entertainment stakes

1. **ESPN** (www.espn.com)
2. **Real Player** (www.real.com)
3. **Shockwave** (www.shockwave.com)
4. **MTV** (www.mtv.com)
5. **Napster** (www.napster.com)
6. **Disney** (www.disney.com)
7. **IGN** (www.ign.com)
8. **BMG** (www.bmgmusicservice.com)
9. **Ticketmaster** (www.ticketmaster.com)
10. **Planet of Music** (www.planetofmusic.com)

Source: Pcdata online

TOP TEN UK BRANDS

The country's most recognised and respected brands.

1. **Coca-cola** (www.cocacola.com)
2. **Walkers Crisps** (www.walkers.co.uk)
3. **Nescafé** (www.nescafe.co.uk)
4. **Andrex** (www.kimberly-clark.com)
5. **Ariel** (www.pg.com)
6. **Persil** (www.persil.com)
7. **Pampers** (www.pampers.com)
8. **Pepsi** (www.pepsi.com))
9. **Stella Artois** (www.stellascreen.com)
10. **Müller Yoghurt** (www.muller.co.uk)

Source: Hoover's Online

TOP TEN WEB NETWORKS

The biggest Internet properties controlling Web content last month

1. **AOL** (www.aol.com)
2. **Yahoo!** (www.yahoo.com)
3. **MSN** (www.msn.com)
4. **Microsoft** (www.microsoft.com)
5. **Lycos Network** (www.lycos.com)
6. **Excite** (www.excite.com)
7. **GO Network** (www.go.com)
8. **eUniverse Network** (www.euniversenetwork.com)
9. **Altavista** (www.altavista.com)
10. **Time Warner** (www.pathfinder.com)

Source: Nielsen/Net ratings

TOP TEN ECOMMERCE SITES

Who's raking in the visitors this month in the UK online shopping stakes

1. **Streets Online** (www.streetsonline.co.uk)
2. **Amazon (UK)** (www.amazon.co.uk)
3. **Egg** (www.egg.com)
4. **Amazon (US)** (www.amazon.com)
5. **Jungle.com** (www.jungle.com)
6. **Lastminute.com** (www.lastminute.com)
7. **UnderGroundOnline** (www.ugo.com)
8. **Barclays Bank** (www.barclays.co.uk)
9. **BOL** (www.bol.com)
10. **Expedia** (www.expedia.com)

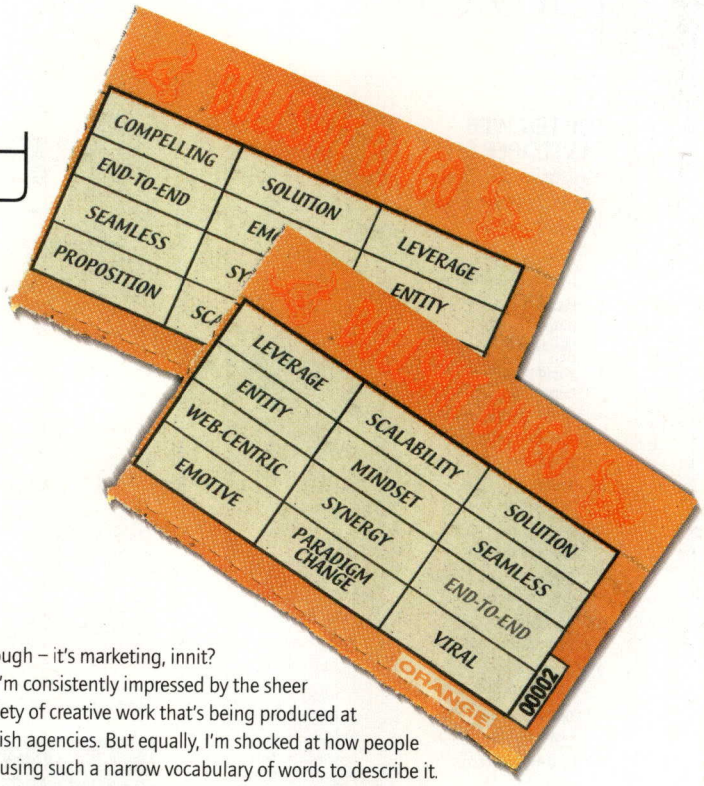
Source: Netvalue

BRAND BUILDING

The importance of online brand building has been highlighted by a new survey from Harris Interactive. According to the survey, 60 per cent of consumers directly input the URL of an ecommerce site when shopping for a particular product. The results of the 'Dot-Shopper Survey' also show that only six per cent of shoppers are driven to online retailers by offline advertising in other media. Harris Interactive also found that 20 per cent of shoppers can be categorised as 'Brand Loyalists'. Usually visiting sites of known and trusted merchants, these shoppers are the most satisfied with ecommerce and spend the largest amount of money online. For the rest of this report see **www.ebates.com**

jargon busted

YOU'RE CAUGHT IN A REPETITIVE DREAM WHERE EVERYONE KEEPS SPOUTING NONSENSE. THEN YOU REALISE IT'S NOT A DREAM AT ALL. STUART DREDGE HAS BROKEN OUT IN A SWEAT



Ever played Bullshit Bingo? It's great. You make up a bingo card, except that the numbers are replaced by meaningless phrases or jargon. Then, in a meeting, you tick off every phrase as it's said. When you get a line, you shout 'Bingo!' – or, if you've lost your appetite for employment, 'Bullshit!'

It started in traditional workplaces, but quickly spread to the ecommerce industry, first in the US, and now here. But it can be adapted for any purpose: a quick visit to Yahoo! revealed several versions, including one aimed at parish priests (http://www.hullp.demon.co.uk/SacredHeart/thought/Nov14th1999Bingo.htm). Although, naturally, they refuse to print the 'Bullshit' part of the name – "If you do not know the word in question, then you are blessed in your innocence."

Anyway, I mention it because in recent interviews I've been semi-regularly fighting the urge to leap to my feet and claim a full house. Numediaspeak is rife in the British design community, and I'm sick to death of it. If I hear one more creative telling me about how their one-stop-shop has been producing personalised end-to-end solutions, I won't be responsible for my actions.

Most new media jargon began life being farted out of the bowels of US marketing execs, eager either to obscure information that they didn't want to talk about, to obscure the fact that they didn't really know what they were talking about, or simply because they'd forgotten how to say anything else. It's also a hangover from the (only recent) days when budding dotcoms could walk into any venture capitalist's office, spout some claptrap including set buzz phrases, and walk away with millions of dollars worth of funding. But why it's now spread to Web designers – the creatives – we don't know.

Take one recent high-profile press launch I attended, where the lead speaker smashed the world record for most utterances in one speech of the words 'compelling', 'personalised' and 'solution'. To be fair, he did strive to utter them in a different order every so often. But after the initial presentation, once the journo questions started flying in, they crept in to pretty much every sentence. Still, fair enough – it's marketing, innit?

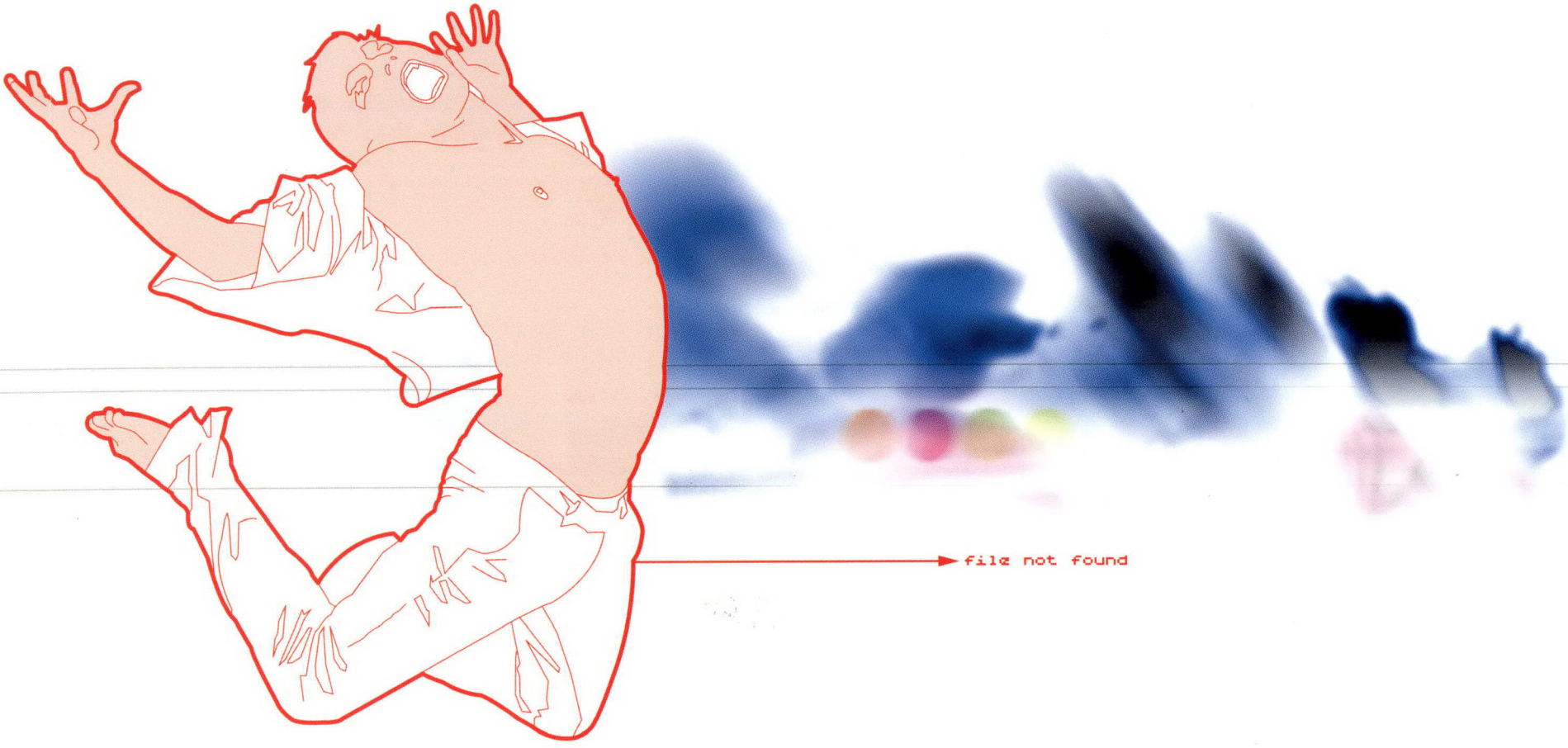
I'm consistently impressed by the sheer variety of creative work that's being produced at British agencies. But equally, I'm shocked at how people are using such a narrow vocabulary of words to describe it. I've got nothing at all against designers coming out with creative babble – it's when they're all using the same creative babble that we start to get sniffy.

It's even rubbing off on me, dammit. Before everyone and their aunt emails in pointing out every incidence of numediaspeak in this issue, I know. And I loathe myself for it. It's one thing to faithfully quote someone; it's another to suddenly realise you've described a site as 'compelling' without actually thinking why you've said it. This stuff lodges itself in your brain and then pops out when you least expect it to. In fact, it's positively viral... Doh! See, there it goes again.

In themselves, none of these words and phrases are especially bad. Personalisation, for example, is a genuinely important trend in Web design, particularly when it comes to the future of online branding. Thinking out of the box started life as a valiant attempt to avoid being stuck into established (and narrow) creative processes. But it's now meaningless – we've managed to think ourselves into a big box. And it's full of jargon.

Emotionalising end-to-end solutions? You can leverage them up yer arse... ■

STUART DREDGE SPENDS HIS TIME PRODUCING *CRE@TEONLINE'S* ONE-STOP CUSTOMER-CENTRIC MARKET PROPOSITIONS. AND ALSO WRITES THE ODD FEATURE.



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